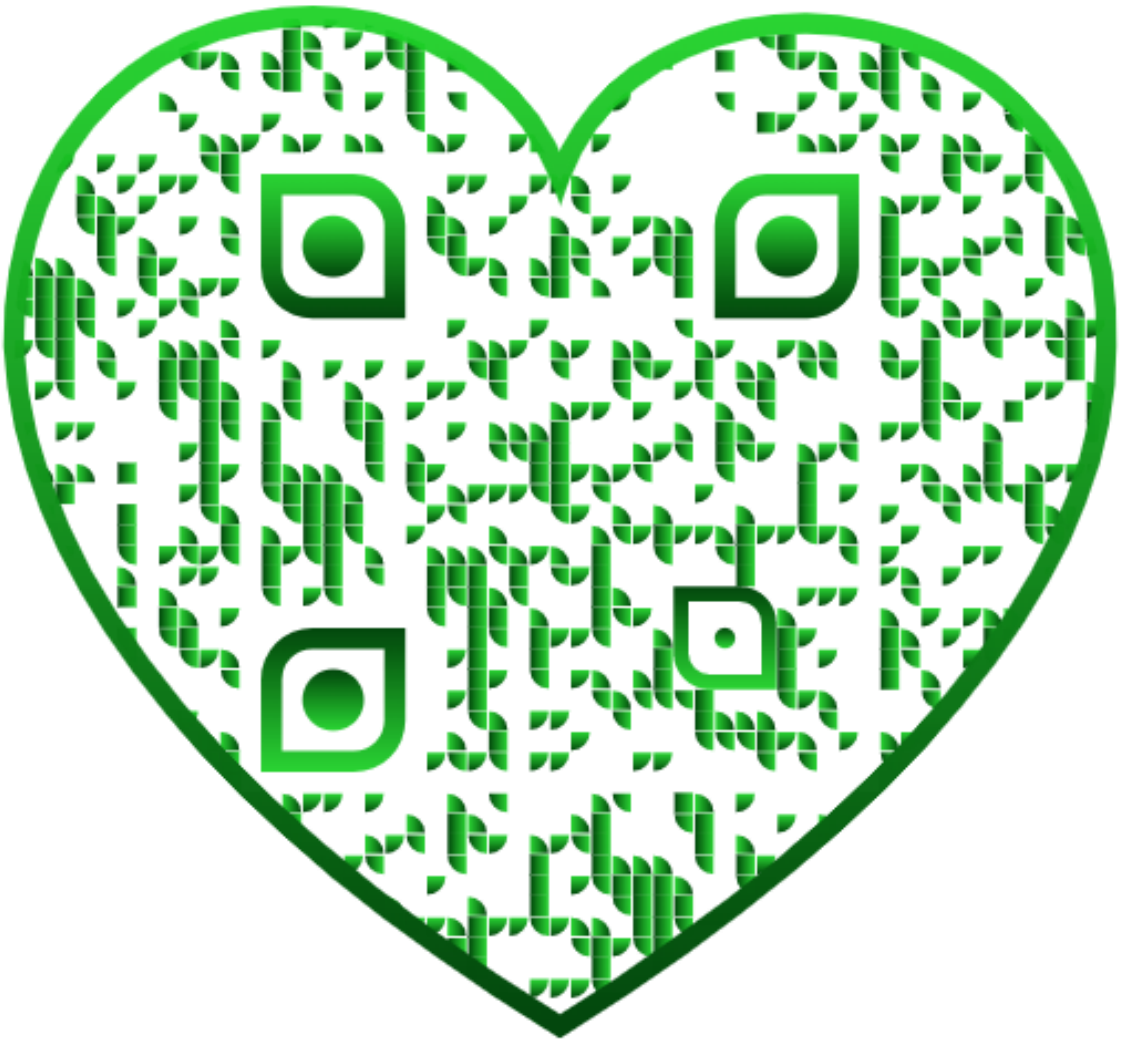
The Guitar Magazine

JANUARY 2018 Vol 29 No 04 £4.99

# GEAR OF THE YEAR 2017

STARRING THE B&G LITTLE SISTER CROSSROADS



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The Guitar Magazine

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# That was the year that was...

It's not that time of year again already, is it? Well, the calendar never lies and although here in magazine land, 2017 has raced past in a fairground carousel-like blur of deadlines, air miles and guitars, guitars and more guitars, one thing is certain – there has definitely been a whole heap of wonderful and inspirational new gear released this year.

As is customary, we assembled shortlists across a variety of categories and asked you to vote for your favourites – turn to p51 to find out which products scooped Gear Of The Year awards before you spend another penny of your hard-earned cash on a new guitar, amp or effects pedal.

And while we're on the subject of glorious new gear, in a matter of weeks we'll be jetting off to the Winter NAMM Show in sunny California, where 2018's hottest new kit will be unveiled in front of a slightly jetlagged and very hungover industry. We'll be armed with video cameras and bringing you our highlights from the show floor via www.youtube.com/theguitarmagazine and our various social media channels. Subscribe now to make sure you don't miss a trick.

Artificially aged acoustic guitars, bluetooth amps and retro electrics abounded this year, and no doubt those trends will continue into 2018, but we're keen to find out what you'd like to see launched by manufacturers big and small in the coming months. As usual, get in touch via theguitarmagazine@anthem-publishing.com and we'll print the most interesting suggestions. In the meantime, enjoy the delights of the festive season and we'll see you in the New Year...

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# *In this issue...*

## THIS MONTH'S EXPERTS...

**DAVE HUNTER**

Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*. Check out his column on p24

**HUW PRICE**

Huw spent 16 years as a pro audio engineer, working with the likes of David Bowie, Primal Scream and Nick Cave. His book, *Recording Guitar & Bass*, was published in 2002, leading into his career in guitar journalism. He also builds and maintains guitars, amps & pedals

**RICHARD PURVIS**

A reformed drummer, Richard has been gigging for over 20 years as a guitarist and bassist, and working as a music journalist for almost as long. He also composes music for television, and is legally married to his 1966 Gibson Melody Maker

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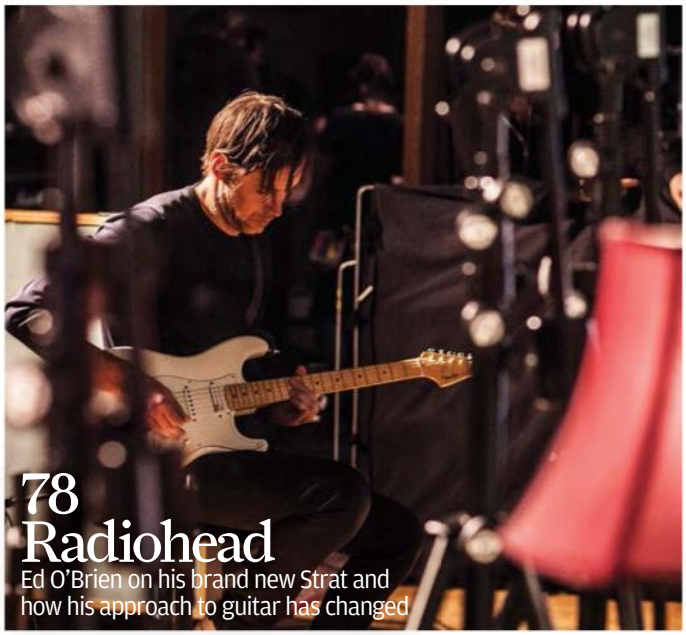
*The polls have closed and the votes counted – find out what we rated the best guitars, amps and effects of 2017*



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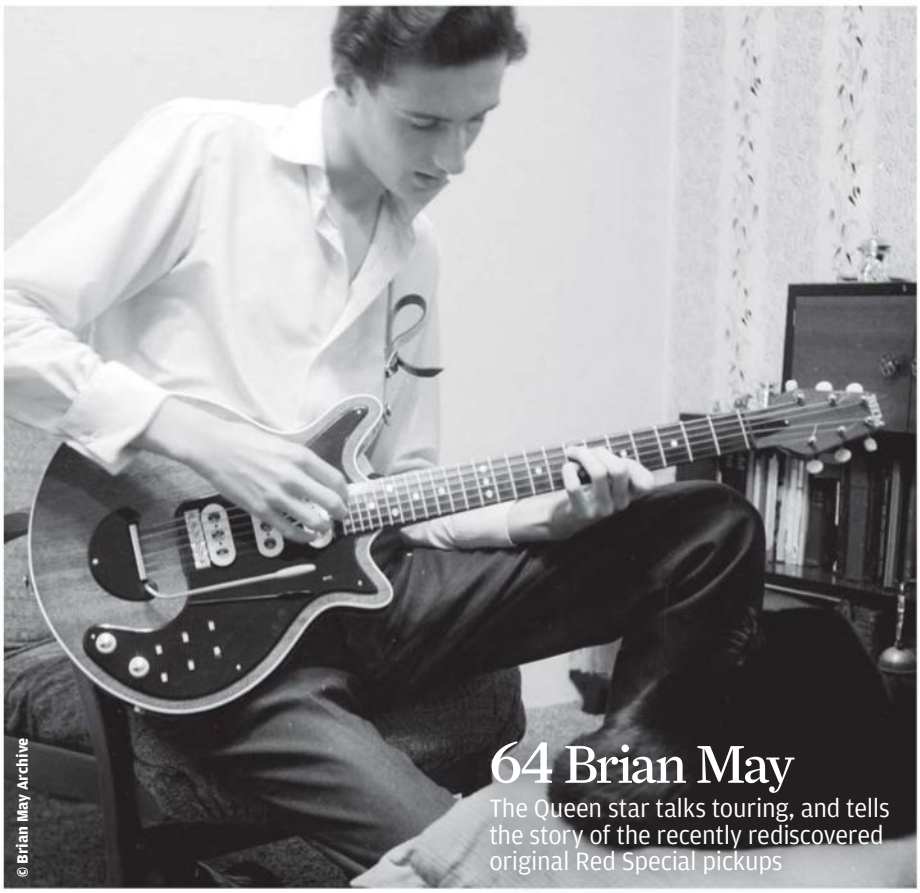

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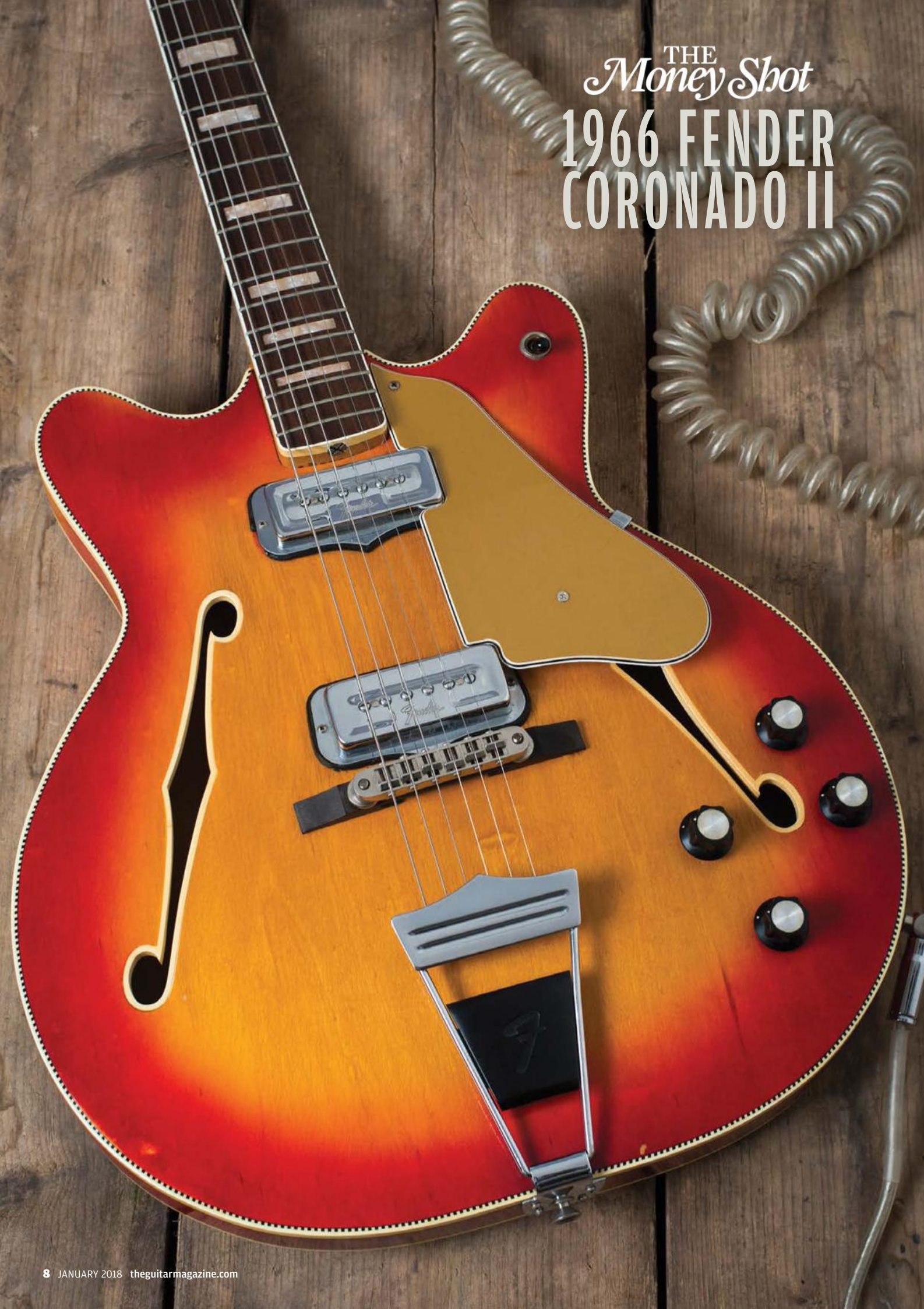


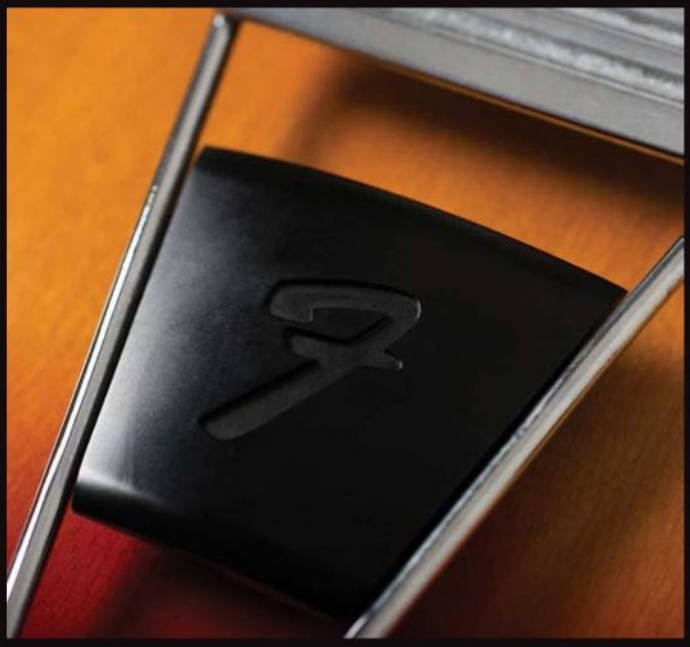
THE *Money Shot*

# 1966 FENDER CORONADO II

As electric guitar amplifiers became more powerful in the late 1960s, hollowbodies with microphonic pickups were hard to handle for those who craved a slice of the new heavy rock sound that was popularised by the likes of Cream and The Jimi Hendrix Experience.

Despite its killer looks and a wild array of finishes that seemed perfectly optimised for the colour television age and the Summer Of Love, Fender's Coronado was one such instrument. In 1972, it fell by the wayside and production ceased, as the guitar players of the day gravitated towards instruments that could better cope with the demands of fuzzboxes and screaming amplifier stacks.

Here in 2017 however, we have the benefit of vastly improved on-stage monitoring, and many live venues now have volume restrictions that make loud valve amps a definite no-no. Suddenly, a whole generation of hollowbody instruments have become viable stage guitars again, and few are cooler than this '66 Coronado II that features in the next Gardiner Houlgate Guitar Auction on 14 December. Head over to www.youtube.com/theguitarmagazine to hear its wonderful 1960s beat-group tones in action and visit www.guitar-auctions.co.uk to see the full auction listings.



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Dawner Prince Electronics' innovative fusions of digital and analogue technology have seen the Croatian boutique effects company rapidly build an impressive reputation, and an impressive client list to go with it. King among Dawner Prince's pedals, however, is the Boonar Multi-head Drum Echo – a hugely versatile and high-quality take on the legendary all-analogue Binson Echorec.

So impressive is Dawner Prince's take on this classic pedal, the little black and gold box has found its way onto the pedalboards of A-list guitarists including John Mayer, and most impressively of all, David Gilmour. "I always hoped to have such big names on our artist list," Dawner Prince mainman Zoran Kraljevic told us back in our most recent issue of *The Joy Of FX*. "But I never spent much time trying to contact artists and offer them endorsements. Instead I directed all my energy into developing top quality products."

That clearly paid off, and when we finally got our hands on one to review last month, we were equally impressed with the quality, versatility and faithfulness of the Boonar's sounds, concluding that it was, "An endlessly fascinating, occasionally unpredictable and always beautiful sounding digital recreation of the Binson Echorec."

For more information on the Boonar and all the other pedals in the Dawner Prince Electronics range, visit **www.dawnerprince.com**, and to be in with a chance of bagging yourself one of David Gilmour's favourite delay pedals, simply correctly answer the question below, and head to the following link to enter...

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Q ***Which of these is NOT a pedal in the current Dawner Prince range?***
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VINTAGE BENCH TEST

# Cherry Bomb

What could be more iconic than a mid 1960s Gibson ES-335, and especially one in such outstanding condition? **HUW PRICE** picks a cherry...

Gibson

When you think about original Les Paul Bursts or pre-CBS Stratocasters, any number of players might spring to mind. With due respect to Alvin Lee, when it comes to Cherry Red ES-335s, the model will forever be associated with the insouciant, gum-chewing Eric Clapton of the Cream era.

Clapton bought his ES-335 brand new in 1964 and used it towards the end of his tenure with The Yardbirds. He owned it during his time with John Mayall's Bluesbreakers, played it throughout Cream and Blind Faith, and continued gigging and recording with it well into the 1990s.

If you want to hear Clapton's 335 'in the raw', check out him playing on *Yer Blues* from *The Rolling Stones Rock And Roll Circus*. In this period curiosity, John Lennon also demonstrates he was indisputably one of rock's great vocalists while Keith Richard (as he was known at the time) proves that it's possible for a bassist to be the coolest guy in the band – but only if you're Keith.

Anyway, we digress. Getting back to ES-335s, had Clapton used his on the 'Beano' album rather than his famous 1960 Les Paul, then today's market for vintage Gibsons might look very different. As it stands, this particular guitar can be yours for the price of a new car rather than a house, and it's certainly no 'fixer-upper'.

*This ES-335 is a rare example of vintage guitar with no issues – and we mean none whatsoever*

This ES-335 is a rare example of vintage guitar with no issues – by which we mean none... whatsoever. Examined up close, it's clearly very old and it has certainly been played. There are some superficial marks, chips and scrapes, along with finish rub-off along the neck binding. Everything blacklights except a bare patch on the back of the neck that is stained to match the finish and can hardly be felt, let alone seen. Let's just say that had this guitar been a person, it could claim to have participated in the 1960s *and* be able to remember them.

None of the horrors so often inflicted on vintage Gibsons apply to this instrument. The headstock

*Above* **This is one of the first ES-335s to ship with nylon saddles, and they're still in situ today**

*Above* **This particular ES-335 is in remarkably good condition for its age. The original frets are still playable and don't need replacing, while the clear collar above the 'reflector' parts of the knobs and the visible pickguard shrinkage are signs of originality**

has never needed a repair and an absence of extra holes and bushing scars indicates that the double ring tulip Kluson tuners are the only ones ever to have been on this guitar. The nylon nut has barely visible shiny spots on the sides, and assuming they are lacquer, it may indicate that it's original, too.

Although the fret nibs are gone, the frets stop at the edge of the Brazilian rosewood fingerboard and a complete absence of chips and file marks suggests that these are factory fitted. This must have been amongst the earliest ES-335s to get nylon saddles and the ABR-1 bridge with the saddle retaining wire was introduced the year before this guitar was made.

Unlike some, the pickguard hasn't curled up to obstruct plain string picking and it's in great shape. Switch tips from this era should be off white and there should be a clear collar above the 'reflector' parts of the knobs. Consider both boxes ticked. Sprague Black Beauty tone capacitors can be seen through the f-hole and the pickups are a PAF and a Patent Number at the neck and bridge respectively with untouched solder joints holding the covers.

*This must have been among the earliest Gibson ES-335s to feature nylon saddles*

## In Use

Many of Gibson's decisions may seem bizarre in hindsight, but no doubt someone in the organisation figured they made sense at the time. Referring specifically to ES-335s, the introduction of the trapeze tailpiece in 1965 is often seen as a low water mark. Just as Gibson players were getting rockier, the ES-335 was made jazzier. The bottom line is probably that trapeze tailpieces are both cheaper and easier to fit.

Which is not to say that the tune-o-matic and stop tailpiece combination is Gibson's greatest sounding example of bridge building. Depending on what you want from a semi, you may actually prefer a trapeze. We mention this because not so long ago, we featured a trapeze-equipped 1965 ES-335 in the mag that was in similarly excellent condition and it was a very different sounding guitar.

No doubt there are other factors and there will be exceptions, but we associate the trapeze with a woodier and

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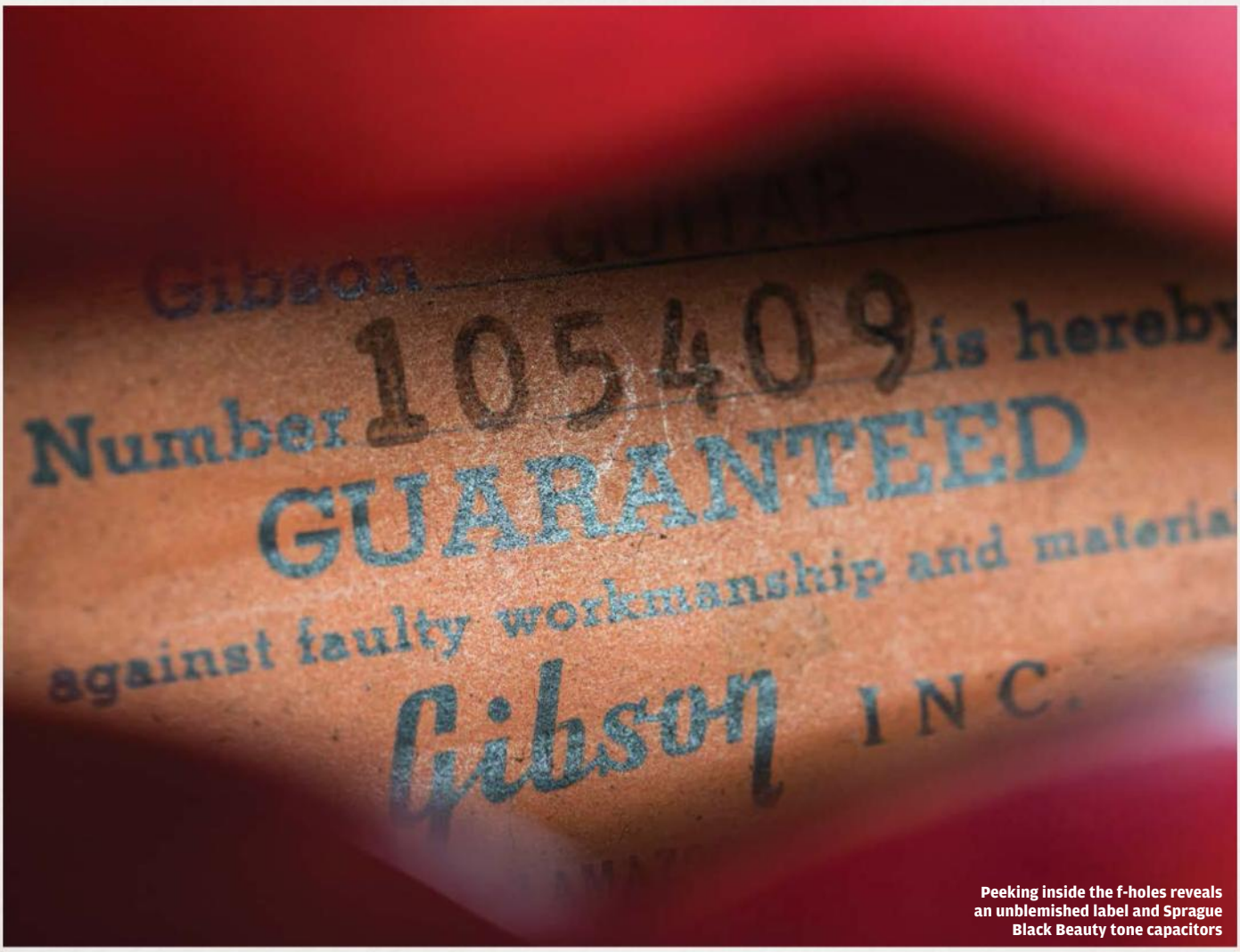



**Peeking inside the f-holes reveals an unblemished label and Sprague Black Beauty tone capacitors**

KEY FEATURES

## 1963 Gibson ES-335

- **PRICE** £16,995
- **DESCRIPTION** Semi-solid electric guitar. Made in the USA
- **BUILD** Pressed laminate front and back, bent laminate sides, maple centre block, long tenon mahogany neck with bound Brazilian rosewood fingerboard, block markers and 22 frets
- **HARDWARE** Vintage Kluson tuners, ABR-1 bridge with retaining wire, stop tailpiece
- **ELECTRICS** PAF & Patent Number humbuckers
- **FINISH** Cherry nitrocellulose
- **SCALE LENGTH** 625.48mm /24.63"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42.68mm at nut, 52.38mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 19mm at first fret, 23mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 37.5mm at nut, 51.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.84kg/8.46lbs
- **CONTACT** Atoyboy Guitars **www.audiotoyshop.com**

smoother tone. In contrast, stop tailpiece models are a little quieter acoustically and lack the lower midrange warmth. In semi-solid terms, a trapeze accentuates the 'semi' and a stop tailpiece the 'solid'.

Amped up, this guitar has a very different vibe, too. Where the '65 was mellow and smooth in a Larry Carlton sort of way, this '63 has a lot more attitude. Returning to the *Rock And Roll Circus* for a moment, to achieve the snarly, biting tone Clapton gets on that, this guitar simply needs to be plugged in with the bridge pickup selected.

In our view, tonal variety is the characteristic that makes this ES-335 one of the most inspiring examples we have tried – probably because the pickups sound so different from one another. The neck is very much warmer and sweeter than the bridge, without being at all muddy or lacking in clarity.

The bridge pickup has a wiry bite due to a fairly pronounced midrange resonance peak that is seemingly absent from the neck unit. It certainly has many PAF-like qualities, but the tone is more modern and aggressive.

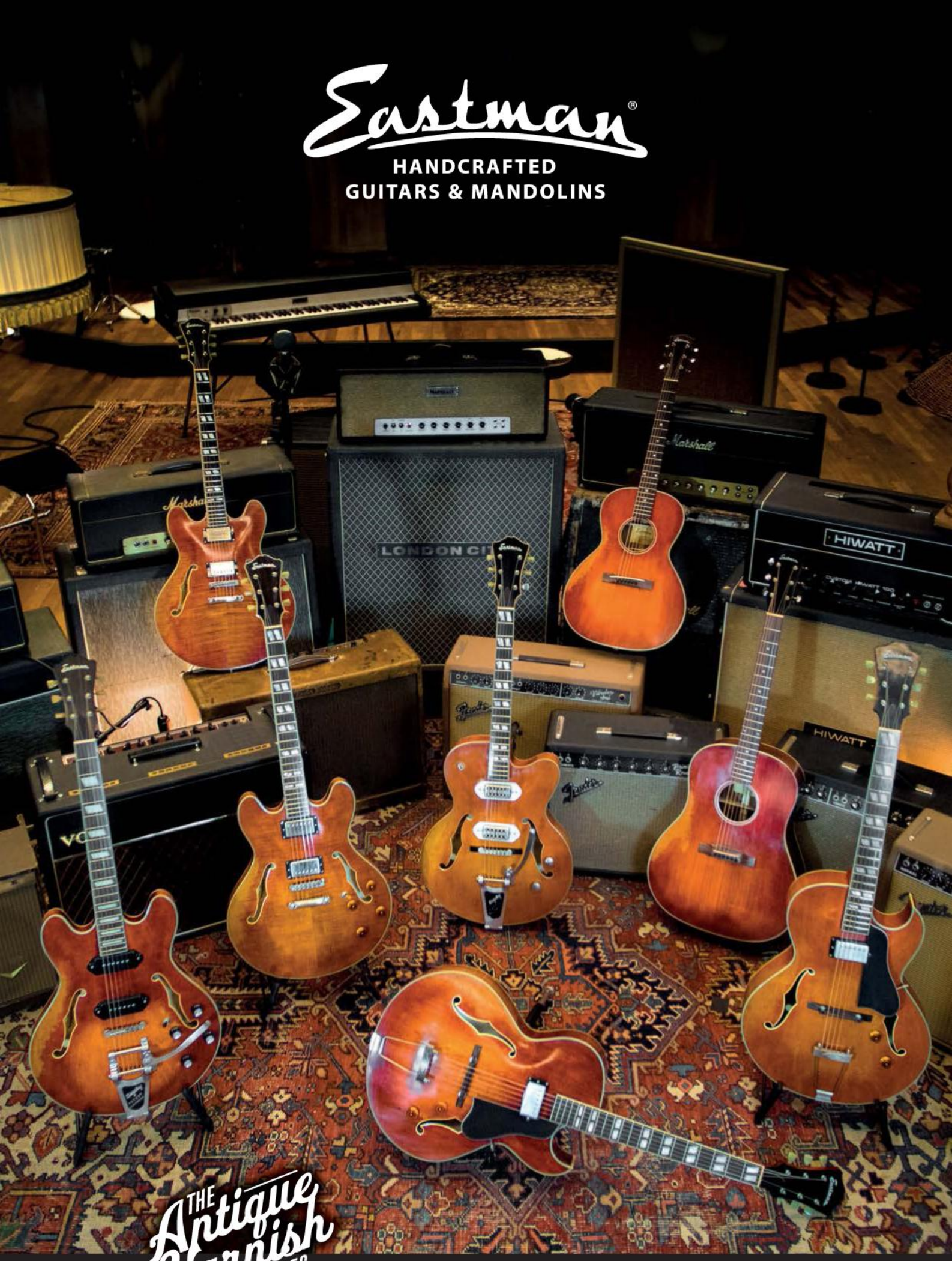
*Tonal variety is the characteristic that makes this ES-335 one of the most inspiring we've tried*

You also get a throaty twang but it doesn't really chime. Although it's possible that both pickups are actually PAFs, the sonic differences do appear to confirm what the stickers suggest.

With one foot in the rock 'n' roll era and the other at the birth of heavy blues, this ES-335 can rock out and deliver mellow jazz tones. When you get into the controls, things become even more interesting as you can alter the pickup balance, explore the excellent clean-up ability and exploit the full tonal range.

Although the frets are original, there is no need for them to be redone and the guitar plays perfectly with a low action, slinky feel and slim (but not too slim) neck with very soft shoulders. The controls work perfectly and silently, and besides some pinging from the nut's high E slot, tuning is smooth and solid.

Getting back to the Cream theme, with this guitar in your collection, the only things standing between you and joyful hours of blues-based pentatonic improvisation are a blazing Marshall amp and the need to talk very, very nicely to your bank manager.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**DAVE HUNTER**
Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of numerous books including *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*

Letters from *America*

# HAHN MODEL 112 GUITAR

New York State luthier Chihoe Hahn does more than just great T-types. **DAVE HUNTER** gets to grips with one of his more individual solidbody guitars

Chihoe Hahn made his name building high-end T-style guitars, and killer T-style guitars at that – although the guitar featured here is something enticingly different from this maker based in Newburgh, New York, on the banks of the Hudson River. Let me set the scene by saying that I've played and reviewed some utterly amazing T-styles from such storied names as Lentz, DeTemple and D'Pergo that sold for $6,500 to $7,500 to $10,000 and more, and never once in the process did I pause to exclaim, "How much for a bolt-neck guitar!?" And yet none of these was a better guitar than the Hahn T-style – his Model 228, which I encountered back in 2008, and which cost less than half the price of the least expensive of those exalted makes. That guitar had irresistible blackguard looks, a faultless playing feel, and a huge, meaty twang with utterly seductive harmonic content.

*There's a lively harmonic sparkle and a ton of sustain, which, even unplugged, it exhibits in abundance*

Even a cursory going-over will tell you that the Model 112 has a goodly dose of Tele DNA, and we'll examine those genes in detail, but the way it's all put together definitely adds up to something different. The design was developed for, and in cooperation with, the late Steely Dan guitarist Walter Becker, primarily in the effort to create a superb all-rounder. "It hangs on the body in a way that is directly between a Tele and a Strat," Chihoe told me. "It is meant to be a totally original guitar that can cover it all – rock, country, blues, jazz – like a Tele or a Strat. It's a guitar that could

KEY FEATURES

## Hahn Model 112 Guitar

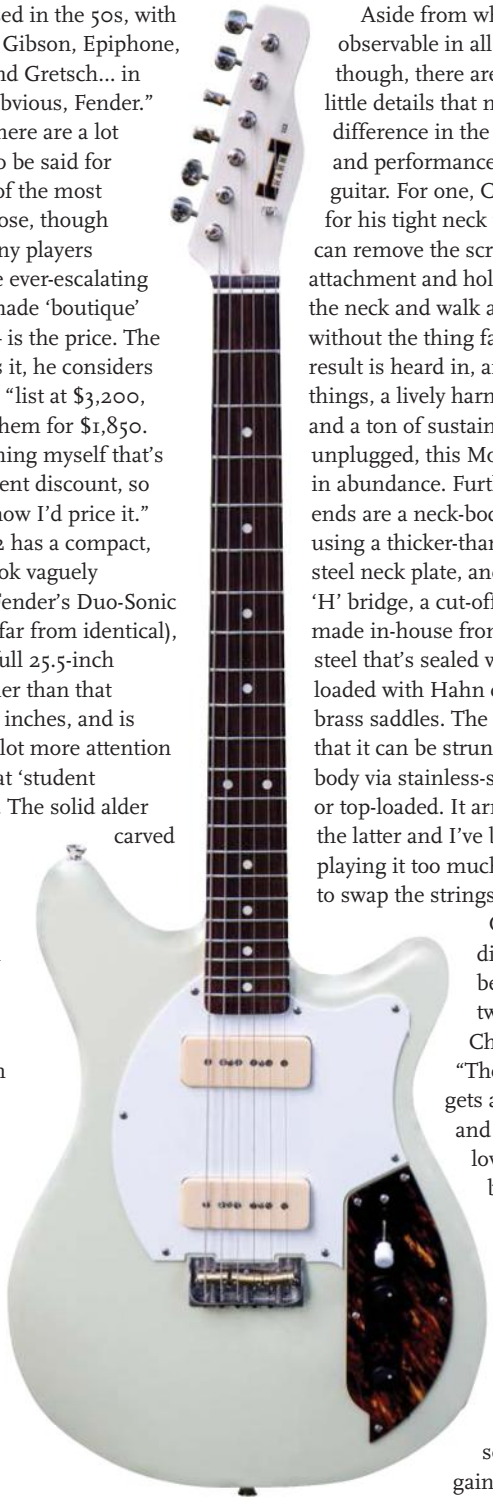
- **PRICE** Introductory price $1,850 (approx. £1,395 plus shipping and any duties)
- **BODY** Solid alder
- **NECK** Maple, bolt-on, with 'C' profile (0.87" deep at 1st fret)
- **FINGERBOARD** Rosewood, 9.5" radius, 25.5" scale length
- **FRETS** 21 medium-jumbo (6105)
- **NUT** Bone
- **PICKUPS** Hahn traditional P-90 bridge, Alnico-pole P-90 neck
- **ELECTRONICS** Individual Tone and Volume controls, three-way toggle switch, Soviet military Teflon 0.022uF tone cap
- **FINISH** Mint, in thin nitrocellulose lacquer
- **HARDWARE** Hahn 'H' cold-rolled steel bridge with compensated Hahn brass saddles, Gotoh Kluson-style tuners
- **CONTACT** hahnguitars.com

have been released in the 50s, with influences from Gibson, Epiphone, Rickenbacker, and Gretsch... in addition to the obvious, Fender."

As we'll see, there are a lot of great things to be said for this guitar; one of the most immediate of those, though – at least for many players familiar with the ever-escalating prices of hand-made 'boutique' electric guitars – is the price. The way Chihoe puts it, he considers the Model 112 to "list at $3,200, but I'm selling them for $1,850. I don't buy anything myself that's not at a 40 per cent discount, so I figured that's how I'd price it."

The Model 112 has a compact, vaguely offset look vaguely reminiscent of Fender's Duo-Sonic II (although it's far from identical), but it runs to a full 25.5-inch scale length rather than that 60s Fender's 24 inches, and is rendered with a lot more attention to detail than that 'student model' ever was. The solid alder body boasts carved contours at both the ribcage and forearm positions, which ups the playing-comfort factor exponentially.

It's finished in ultra-thin nitro lacquer with no plasticisers, in a hue I'm calling 'Mint', which contrasts beautifully with the fire-stripe tortie control plate, white pickguard, and white facing of the headstock.



Aside from what is outwardly observable in all of this, though, there are a lot of subtle little details that make a big difference in the overall sound and performance of a Hahn guitar. For one, Chihoe is known for his tight neck pockets – you can remove the screws from the attachment and hold the guitar by the neck and walk around the room without the thing falling apart. The result is heard in, among other things, a lively harmonic sparkle and a ton of sustain – which, even unplugged, this Model 112 exhibits in abundance. Furthering these ends are a neck-body coupling using a thicker-than-usual stainless-steel neck plate, and Hahn's own 'H' bridge, a cut-off T-style bridge made in-house from cold-rolled steel that's sealed with lacquer, and loaded with Hahn compensated brass saddles. The nifty trick here is that it can be strung either through-body via stainless-steel ferrules, or top-loaded. It arrived set up for the latter and I've been enjoying playing it too much to take the time to swap the strings over.

Of the differences between the two approaches, Chihoe relates: "The through-body gets a tighter sound and develops more low-mids and bass — generally widening the sonic range and harmonic content. But the top-loader, to me, makes it a little looser, like a Gibson, so it's better with gain. The top-loading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**Left** The nicely figured maple neck is carved to a well-rounded C profile

**Top right** The neck pocket is so tightly fitted that you can unscrew the neck bolts and it stays snugly in place

**Bottom right** The pickups are wound in-house by Hahn's Rob Banta

also decreases the attack, giving more energy for the decay, which we perceive as sustain."

The maple neck is carved to a well-rounded C, measuring 0.87 inches deep at the first fret, and the shape feels superb in the hand. The rosewood fingerboard atop it is a lovely dark-chocolatey brown, and the entire configuration plays beautifully.

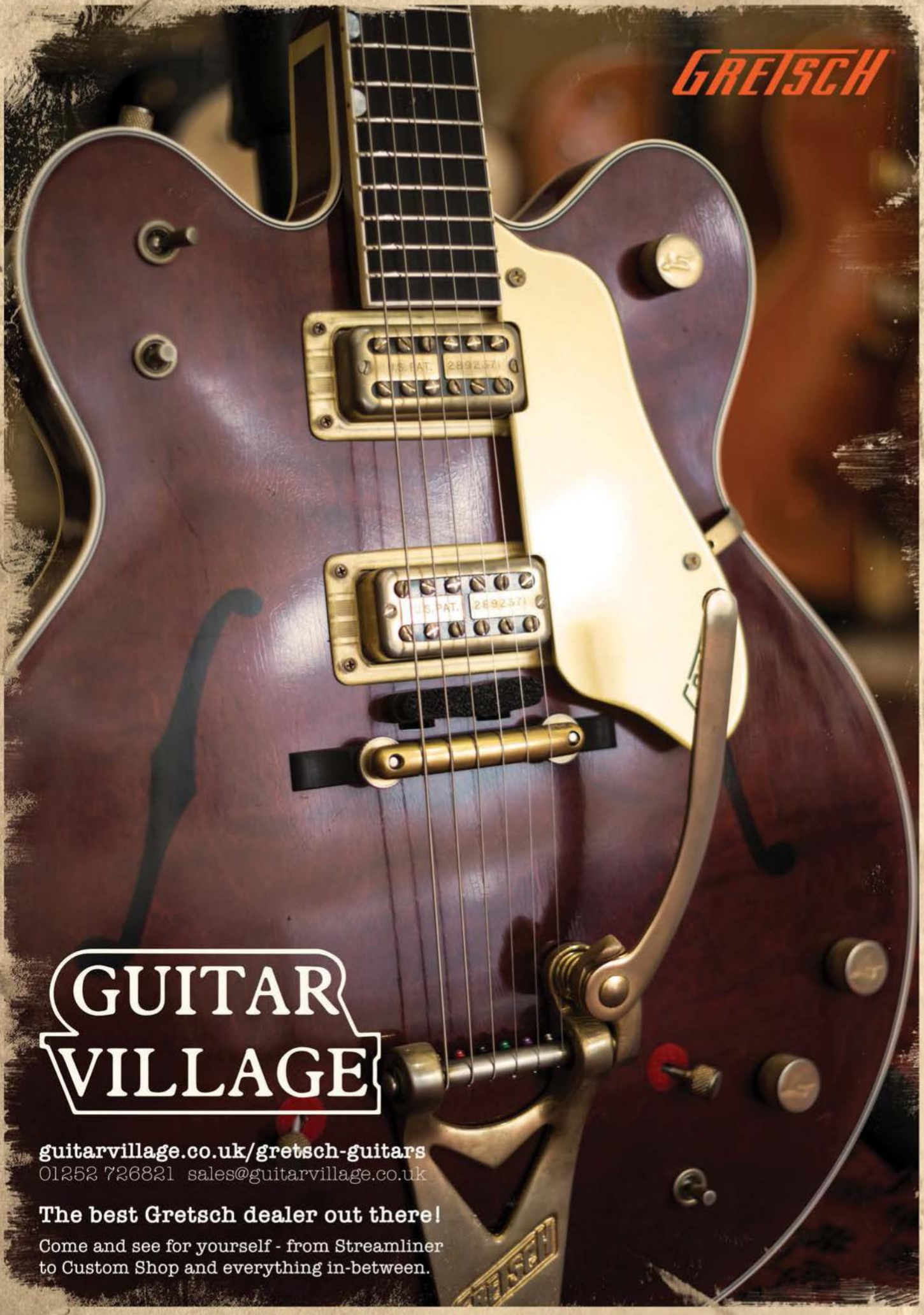
Pickups are Hahn's in-house make, wound on the premises by Rob Banta, and include a traditional P-90 in the bridge position and an Alnico-pole P-90 in the neck.

It's such a tired cliché to say a guitar 'rings like a bell', and yet dammit, that's precisely the phrase that comes to mind when I hit a big first-position G chord on this thing. This guitar is extremely lively and clear, articulate, big, and piano-like in its decay, with swirling harmonic overtones as it rings. I find myself immediately drawn to a slew of finger-picked Tele licks and faux-steel bends, all of which are a breeze on the Model 112, and sound just right. But this guitar certainly loves to rock, too. Plugged into a Divided by 13 CCC 9/15 combo and a custom JTM45-style head and 2x12 with an assortment of overdrive pedals, this combination of pickups throws out some surprises. The bridge is meaty, gnarly classic rock all the way, and certainly able to dial in some fat-Tele-like tones, but more than capable of snarling and barking and pushing either amp pretty hard, too, in a thick and delectable way.

*This is just a great, utilitarian workhorse of a guitar, yet one that is made to deceptively high standards*

As expected, the Alnico-pole neck pickup achieves more snap and clarity from that position than a traditional P-90 generally delivers, and is a true delight in the process, but the middle position is the real kicker. With both pickups selected, the Model 112 delivers an original voice that seems, to me, an equal amalgam of classic Gretsch, Rickenbacker, Gibson and Fender tones—lively, clear, full, bright, slightly rude, yet just refined enough. It's a ton of fun to play, and leads to some delightful genre-busting, yet without ever sounding alien or novelty.

Throw it all together, and this is just a great, utilitarian workhorse of a guitar, yet one that is made to deceptively high standards, and a refreshingly original style to boot. By any measure, the Model 112 is tons of fun, and definitely worth checking out. Oh, and when you do, also take a look at Hahn's other new design, the ridiculously cool Model 910 (modified T shape, chambered mahogany body, original pickups), which I'm also itching to try out.




Custom Shop 1962 G6122 Country Gentleman Relic

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# Gang Planks

From Jack Bruce to Rod Stewart via diversion to heavy metal and punk rock, Bill Liesegang has enjoyed a varied and exciting career in music. **LARS MULLEN** finds out about the equally eclectic guitars he's used along the way...

Bill Liesegang has played with many an iconic musician, taking on many guises along the way. Having grown up playing blues rock and metal, he tried the punk rock scene with success, and has since worked on albums and toured with the likes of Jack Bruce, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Robert Fripp, John Wetton, Transvision Vamp and Rod Stewart.

"I could actually blame my grandmother for my career in rock 'n' roll," laughs Bill. "It's certainly been an interesting journey. I was learning the violin at school, which was sort of okay, but being the only boy in a class full of girls wasn't cool back then for an eight-year-old, so that didn't last long. My gran was an opera singer living in Germany, she knew I was so into the British beat boom at an early age, so she sent me over an acoustic guitar, bless her. We're talking 11 years old now, so my hands are getting big enough to hold chords on a neck but, like so many of those early guitars, it was virtually unplayable.

"Moving up the scale slightly to an almost playable electric, I formed the compulsory school band which was probably the coolest thing you could do at that age in the 60s. How cool I looked in my teens playing slide with a sherry bottle, just like the guitarist I had seen on TV in The Pretty Things."

Playing in a band would have an equally transformative impact on Bill's musical tastes, as his bandmates exposed him to a whole new world. "The older guys in the band introduced me to guitar bands like Cream and blues players like John Mayall and Eric Clapton." he recalls. "I learnt all the Clapton solos from the classic Beano album. Then Hendrix came on the

*Above* **Bill got into session work in the 80s, where his stripped '63 Strat and double-neck came in handy**

scene so we did a mishmash of blues and psychedelic rock. I had all the hair and looked the part. I was lucky enough to get my hands on a Strat and saved all the money I earned in my Dad's bakery to buy a Tone Bender and stage clothes, although starting at the bakery at 5am wasn't rock 'n' roll!"

## Denmark Calling

In his late teens, Bill's family moved to Germany, but he opted to stay behind in the UK, "I was thinking, 'I'm 17, I can look after myself!'" says Bill, rolling his eyes. "My Dad sent over the money to pay for a college course which I blew on a Marshall stack and was penniless for the rest of the year. I formed a metal band called Tank, bought a van for a fiver and painted a huge tank on the side. The van was a total wreck, the handbrake failed and it rolled down Clifton Hill in Bristol where we abandoned it. For years it could be seen from the London to Bristol railway line on top of a rubbish tip, which was a reminder of a poorly spent five quid."

Like so many other young guitarists of the age, Bill was drawn to London's Denmark Street, where a job in the famous Macari's music shop provided a great education for a young musician. "I could play as many guitars as I liked!" he enthuses. "And I got to know so many great players from that shop – all those rock stars who turned in to legends just walking through the door. Even David Bowie, who I played with at various festivals. He'd just released *Space Oddity* and was looking for a permanent guitarist, but I declined because of college."

Near-brushes with megastardom aside, there was something about an old Les Paul hanging on the wall in Macari's that kept Bill awake at night...

"Like I said, I could try any guitar in the shop, but this certain Les Paul had the sound you hear in your head," he enthuses. "I would keep moving it to the end of the wall so customers wouldn't see it! I really wanted that guitar and ended up selling most of the gear I'd acquired to pay for it."

The guitar's original pickups had been swapped for a pair of '58 PAF humbuckers, and he later added a Schaller fine-tune tailpiece and locking tuners – both of which Bill says have proved "invaluable" in the studio over the years. The original Goldtop finish had been removed and refinished in Cherry sunburst, which itself had started to fade by the time Bill took ownership. "I actually bought it the same day as I met

my wife, I'm not sure which one has faded better!" chuckles Bill. "I've played it all over the world and never had a re-fret."

## Black Box Recording

When it came to the amplification side of things, Bill's head was turned by the same legendary black and gold boxes that had captivated so many other players of that era, and still does today. "A Marshall JTM45 completes the sonic equation for me," he says. "I also have a few Lead & Bass heads, which I use for studio work. That guitar and the JTM45 have helped me get some great gigs. Phil Manzanera heard me use this configuration and recommended me to Jack Bruce – which I thought was the best thing, as I'd grown up listening to Cream. I also played with Jack at Chelmsford Blues Festival about a year before he died in 2014. We did the Cream set again, and I remember we were playing White Room and he was shouting 'slower!' because he'd recently been playing these songs with a jazz band at different tempos."

*"Working in Macari's meant I could play as many guitars as I liked! And I got to know so many rock stars"*

Before he was jamming with classic rock legends, however, Bill had time to take a metal diversion along the way... "Back in the early 80s, I was still a poor guitarist," he remembers. "I formed a band called Xero from a previous band called The Shots with Bruce Dickinson, and we went down the New Wave Of British Heavy Metal road. Again, none of us had any money, but the thought of pawning the Les Paul didn't even enter my head."

It was around this time that Bill had another brush with the big time, "I went for an audition as guitarist with Motörhead," he says. "I still had a horse mane of hair, but I wore a head scarf, which Lemmy wasn't keen on, – he also said if I was a true soldier I'd have my bullet belt the other way up, in case they went off and went through my heart. I remember leaving the audition so pissed I couldn't stand up. Lemmy liked the songs I was

*Above* **Bill used his 70s Strat on tour with Nina Hagen, but it suffered a nasty neck break on tour, and was retro-fitted with a spare from a Kramer**

*Top left* **Around the time he started playing with Nina Hagen, Bill became a Kramer endorsee, and the white 1984 Baretta became his main guitar**

writing in Xero and I heard later that the album was the most played on the Motörhead bus... but I still didn't get the job!"

## New Direction

In 1984, however, Bill left the NWOBHM behind and headed in a totally new direction, but it was one that saw him leave his beloved Les Paul at home, too. "I joined Nina Hagen's band and it all changed dramatically for me," Bill explains. "It seemed the natural thing to do – in my mind I hear my grandmother saying, 'Go for it!' as Nina was also German and at the time was called the Godmother Of Punk. We toured extensively, but when the bass player had his favourite Alembic bass stolen in South America, I decided to leave the 'Paul at home. Looking back, I was grateful as Nina was so unpredictable, I was playing a Strat the night she decided to trash the stage in the USA. The drums went first, then the headstock of my 70s Strat!"

Getting his Strat totalled came with an upside, however... "I quickly needed a replacement and managed to get an endorsement deal with Kramer guitars whilst on the road," he remembers. "This was ideal as I needed a guitar with a little more output. This was in the early days of Van Halen, and Kramer had just brought out the Baretta, which was more suited to the sound and style of Nina's songs, where I had to jump from a funky groove to full-on whammy bar solos.

"Kramer also gave me a spare neck and a Floyd Rose, which I fitted to the damaged Strat, and it became a bit of a hardware donor. I fitted the Strat single coils to my white '84 Kramer Baretta. These were the main two guitars I used with Nina. I also have a later model with a splashed paint finish."

Playing with Nina gave Bill that chance to experiment with new gear, but also a new look, and we're not just talking guitars. "I picked up my 80s Camak in Berlin, also on tour with Nina. It wasn't expensive, I just needed a back up to the Kramers. It was trendy at the time to fit a Floyd Rose vibrato system, so I had this one fitted by Steve Vai's tech when we were based in LA I also had to change my visual appearance to fit in with the punk approach in Nina's band. The most traumatic change was shaving my head after having such a big haircut, I did keep a very long blonde pony tail which Nina dyed blue!"

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## Better Call Bill

Over his varied career, Bill also managed to fit in session work with some of the finest record producers and artists in the pop world. But once again reaching for a new guitar to suit the occasion.

"I was also heavily into session work in the USA and UK during the 80s working with talented record producers like Trevor Horn on many songs in different styles, from punk to pop. Transvision Vamp's *Baby I Don't Care* and Rod Stewart's *Downtown Train* saw me back playing Strats once again, with my '63 Strat the main contender. I saw it advertised in *Loot* – it was fairly cheap as it had been re finished with gloss paint! I used paint stripper to try and get it off, but it had soaked into the wood which has left a pink hue. I wasn't too fussed how it looked and it sounded so much better unfinished. My Fender twin-neck is a bit of a hybrid and obviously another great studio guitar. I don't know that much about it, I believe it dates from the 80s."

While he always loves the classic guitar brands, his time with Nina gave him a penchant for more esoteric fare. "My German-made Duesenberg Schmitt, was originally made for Michael Schenker and looks like a cross between a Gibson Explorer and a Flying V," he observes. "It has a crazy vibrato system that also has a lever at the back of the guitar so it can be operated by thrusting your thigh. Apart from making you look insane on stage, it went out of tune every time I shook a leg, so the road crew disabled it!"

Another result of his time with Hagen was coming across smaller luthiers out on tour. "I was approached by Design4Sound from Austria when touring there with Nina," he recalls. "They wanted me to play their Electric Babe guitars. The pickup permutations tip their hats to Strats and Teles but after that, they're totally off the wall both with 'female' body shapes and names. They called the white one Lily the black one Lola. They're built really well with quality parts and sound excellent.

"I'm sure working in guitar shops all those years ago is one reason why I like alternative guitars. For example, my Switch Vibracell guitars, which are from the Wild series designed by Trevor Wilkinson. The twin-humbucker model actually has the closet recorded sound to my Les Paul. They're both fitted with Roland GK-3 MIDI systems. I have written a lot of TV scores where these have proved invaluable, along with my Yamaha RGXA2, where I installed an XY MIDI pad touchscreen – it's so handy to control modulation effects in the studio and the guitar itself is really light for those two-hour gigs."

## Coming Up For Air

While his band career has been primarily electric-focussed, his studio life saw him become more comfortable as an acoustic player.

"I more or less got into recording with acoustic guitars when I was producing albums for bands based in LA, like 101 South and Harlan Cage, which both sat in the AOR category along with the likes of Foreigner and Journey," he confirms. "I have a nice Martin, which speaks for itself, but I also love the sound of some early basic acoustic guitars and I think sometimes if you want that sound, you have to have one from that period. The oldest acoustic I have is this archtop which I'm told is a Framus Black Rose from 1959."

Another acoustic in his collection could have been missed if he hadn't been paying attention on the tour bus. "I clearly remember shouting, 'Stop the bus!' when I saw an early 50s Horst Dietrich nylon-strung Schrammel double-neck," he chuckles. "I was touring through Germany and saw it in a dusty old shop window. I shouldn't have been so surprised how good it sounded, as it's made with such love and affection. It's designed really for the fretless fingerboard to play open bass notes while playing chords on traditional fretted board. I figured it would take years to play in this style, so I use the unfretted board as drone strings, you can hear this on a track called *Midnight Surfer* from my album *No Strings Attached*, which features Glenn Hughes and John Wetton in 2009.

"Unlike my rock/metal days, I didn't have the hair for that band. I actually met up with Lemmy again when I had the blue pony tail, he said, 'Kin' 'ell Bill, if you'd turned up for the audition like that I might have given you the job!'"

*Opposite top* **Three of Bill's more airy guitars – (l-r) a 2001 Hofner President, an '86 OPI USA Dobro and most uniquely, a 1950s Horst Dietrich nylon-string Schrammel double neck**

*Opposite bottom left* **Bill's Yamaha SG2000, and his prototype JJ Guitars single-cut electric**

*Opposite bottom right* **A PRS Santana II and his Yamaha RGXA2, which has been modded with an XY pad**

Want to see your guitars, amps or effects featured in the pages of *The Guitar Magazine*? Email the details and a few taster pics to **theguitarmagazine@anthem-publishing.com** to be considered for a future issue

IN ASSOCIATION WITH Reverb

TIME MACHINES

# 1973 GRETSCH SUPER CHET

## Gretsch's most famous endorsee had a variety of different signature instruments over his decades with the company – this Super Chet is one of the more unusual examples...

**VITAL STATISTICS**

**1973 Gretsch Super Chet**

- **PRICE** £3,495
- **MANUFACTURER** Gretsch. Made in USA
- **TYPE** Hollowbody electric guitar
- **REVERB SELLER** Vintage Guitar Boutique reverb.com/uk/shop/vintage-guitar-boutique
- **SEE MORE** reverb.com/item/4848961-1973-gretsch-super-chet-autumn-red

Chet Atkins' association with Gretsch may be one of most important endorsee-brand relationships in all of vintage guitar history. Starting in the mid-50s and lasting until 1979, Atkins was a consultant designer and consistent user of a range of different Gretsch models, several of which rank as the most iconic guitars the company ever produced.

While original 50s designs such as the 6120 Chet Atkins Hollow Body and 6122 Chet Atkins Country Gentleman remain the most famous Atkins-endorsed guitars, the 1970s saw Gretsch – by then part of the Baldwin company – release a new wave of more modern Atkins models meant to compete with the dominance of Fender and Gibson. Here we're focusing on the Super Chet model, which was originally launched in 1972.

Released alongside the similar, though somewhat plainer, Deluxe Chet, the Super Chet was intended to be one of the most visually elegant and beautiful guitars ever made. It sported thick binding on the neck, elaborate inlay patterns on the headstock, and a fretboard meant to reflect the high-end parlour guitars of the late-1800s.

"I started working on the design of the Super Chet in 1971," Chet wrote of the birth of the model in his book, *Chet Atkins: Me and My Guitars*. "I wanted to build a guitar that looked as beautiful as it sounded. Clyde Edwards, who worked for Baldwin, designed the body shape, a true f-hole hollowbody. It didn't have the solidity all the way through like I wanted, but it was still a very good guitar. With abalone inlay in the headstock, fingerboard, and tailpiece, it was probably the fanciest-looking guitar Gretsch ever produced."

Chet mentions the lack of "solidity" in reference to the fact that this guitar was a true hollowbody without a wooden centre block. Later in the decade, the final Chet Gretsch design would come in the form of the Super Axe, which was a solidbody and also sported built-in effects.

Our featured Super Chet comes from Vintage Guitar Boutique on Redchurch Street in London, and proudly exhibits everything that made this short-lived guitar special. As you can see from the image, all of the original cosmetic details are still intact and the original Autumn Red finish looks as vibrant as ever.

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# TEXAS SPECIAL

Late October saw guitar enthusiasts descend on the Lone Star State in their droves for Guitarlington 2017 in Arlington, Texas. *The Guitar Magazine*'s roving reporter David Plues was there...

1

Guitarlington 2017 saw two huge rooms of the Arlington Convention Center, plus an additional Heritage Auctions preview room, packed with stellar instruments. The show is famed for vintage but there were plenty of new guitars and amps along with specialist builders and accessories.

This year featured some great pieces with clean vintage guitars demanding high-ticket prices. Blackguard Telecasters in clean condition were hitting the $50,000 mark but examples with modifications could be found for closer to $20,000. Clean 1950s Strats were hovering around $33k.

Fans of vintage Les Pauls were well served for eye candy, with Les Paul Forum co-owner Tom Wittrock displaying Donna (serial number 9-1923) and the Moonburst (8-5386) (1). 'Burst Brother' Drew Berlin had two Bursts for sale along with other desirable Gibsons, while three 'walk in' Bursts (2) were a magnet for both dealers and the public.

New guitars were available in abundance from a string of stateside retailers, but among the best bargains were several Fender blackface amplifiers in great condition at very reasonable prices. There were even experts on hand to help us Europeans with shipping problems! Meanwhile, Tom Van Hoose had a spectacular stand featuring Super 400s and other great jazz guitars (3). We were able to play and examine a stunning Monteleone. Nearby, Clint Strong and Danny McNight were playing some incredible jazz guitar.

Vintage aficionado Eric Ernest produced a surprise for the show. On hearing that the old Gibson Kalamazoo factory was having a clear-out, he negotiated for a 'skip' of bits and pieces. Various jigs (4) were about to hit the landfill but Eric lovingly restored and preserved them for posterity.

It is always a pleasure to talk to Norman Harris of Norman's Rare Guitars (5) fame who was making selective purchases throughout the show. We caught up with him on the last day to find out what his favourite purchase was and he showed us a wonderful mint condition pre-war Martin.

On top of all that there was much to love for bass players, parts specialists, case builders, fans of hand tooled leather straps and plenty more besides. The bonus of the Heritage Auctions preview and a Saturday night jam in the Sheraton Hotel meant that it all added up to an unforgettable experience. Every guitar fan should make the pilgrimage to Guitarlington at least once!

**Visit www.amigoguitarshows.com for more**

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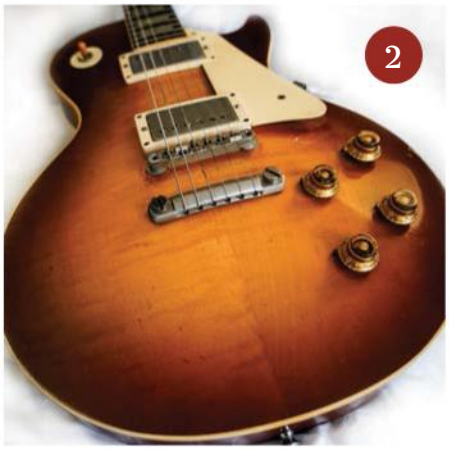
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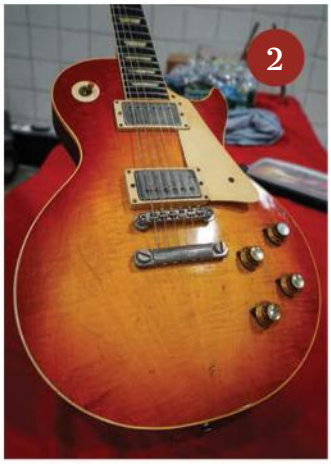
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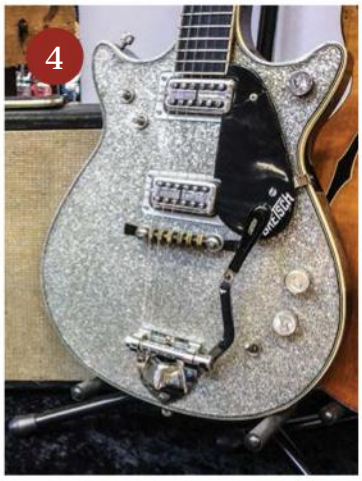

# The Copenhagen Guitar Show

We had trouble Copen' with all the guitars at Denmark's premier guitar show. **CHARLIE HOLLEY** gives us the highlights from the show floor...

1. The ultra rare Fender 'Lenny' SRV tribute Stratocaster
2. The sports hall venue was far nicer than those we remember from our school days
3. Gus G tore it up for an hour at one of the show's many clinics
4. A beautiful 60s Gretsch Silver Jet, with original Burns vibrato, and accompanying amp
5. 'Proper' Relic! This gorgeously well worn 1957 Telecaster was a highlight of the show for us

Copenhagen, Denmark is one of the most charming cities in the world, in our humble opinion, and once a year it is made even better by the addition of a building full of guitars – The Copenhagen Guitar Show.

As you first walk in you are struck by the size of the thing... Surprisingly small, really! But packed to the exposed wood rafters with myriad funky little titbits for discovery and, if you so wish, purchase. Vintage guitars and amps are abound, with some weird and wonderful items catching the eye – a guitar made out of a spade here, a '57 Tele there.

With upwards of 1,000 attendees per day each year (it runs over the weekend) and 56 stall holders – ranging from tiny one-person enterprises and private collectors, through music stores and dealerships, and to the big players in the industry (this year including Fender and Yamaha) – there really is something for everyone, from beginner to total guitar-nerd-enthusiast alike.

You will also find clinics from some pretty big names – on this trip we were treated to the guitar stylings of GN'R alumni Ron 'Bumblefoot' Thal, as well as ex-Ozzy sideman and Jackson signature artist, Gus G.

Well worth the trip, we thought, and of course there was the added bonus of a weekend in Copenhagen, which is about as wonderful a bonus as you could hope for.

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Fender Custom Shop 1951 Heavy Relic Tele - Nocaster blonde ..... £2,699
Fender Custom Shop 1956 Limited Edition Reilc Strat - foam green .... £2,899
Fender Custom Shop 1960 Relic Strat - aged daphne blue ..... £3,099
Fender Custom Shop 52 Limited Edition Relic Tele - blonde - used ..... £1,990
Fender Custom Shop 57 Journeyman Relic Strat - 2 tone sunburst ..... £2,750
Fender Custom Shop 59 Relic Esquire - faded taos turquoise ..... £2,690
Fender Custom Shop 62 Heavy Relic Strat - 3 tone sunburst ..... £2,799
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Fender Custom Shop Post Modern Relic Strat - used/2015 ..... £1,749
Fender Custom Shop Postmodern Relic Strat - Lake Placid Blue ... £2,590
Fender Custom Shop Postmodern NOS Strat - sea foam green ..... £2,449
Fender Masterbuilt Todd Krause 1963 Relic Strat - used/2015 .... £4,890
Fender Masterbuilt Todd Krause 57 Relic Strat - black - used/2015 .... £3,890
Fender Strat hard tail - natural - circa 1974 ..... £2,390
Fender Tele Custom - black - circa 1974 ..... £2,775
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Gibson Les Paul Classic - Bullion Gold - 1991 ..... £1,990
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Gibson Les Paul Collectors Choice CC #11 Rosie ..... £4,100
Gibson Les Paul Standard - black - Used/1988 ..... £1,469
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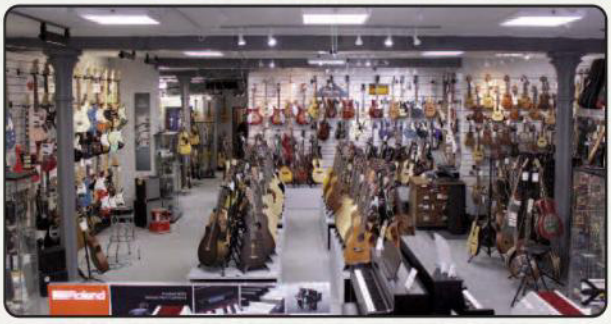

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Tony Bacon writes books about guitars and guitarists: more at tonybacon.co.uk. His latest is *Electric Guitars Design And Invention* (Backbeat), which shows why electrics are the way they are



# CONTROL FREAK

Have you ever picked up an electric guitar, glanced down at the various controls seated on the body and thought, 'I have no idea what you actually do'? **TONY BACON** has, and in the case of some guitars that's totally understandable...

I blame Alvino Rey. He was a guitarist and electronics nut, and in the 1930s he helped Gibson fool around with early pickups and amplification. Apparently it was Rey's idea to add a tone knob alongside the volume knob on the E-150, Gibson's first electric guitar – a lap-steel launched at the end of 1935, and the first with a tone knob. It was followed a year later by the ES-150, Gibson's first proper electric. Since then, some of us have got a little out of control.

Case in point, have you ever seen a mid-70s Godwin Guitar Organ? I covered it in *The Ultimate Guitar Book*, if you're interested, and it bares examination because it's the guitar with the most controls ever. There are no fewer than 13 knobs and 19 switches! Even the geeks at Godwin probably weren't sure exactly what they all did. If you're like me, though, I expect you have two hands and roughly 10 fingers, so you can only fiddle around so much. Especially if you have what seems like an Italian church organ slung round your neck.

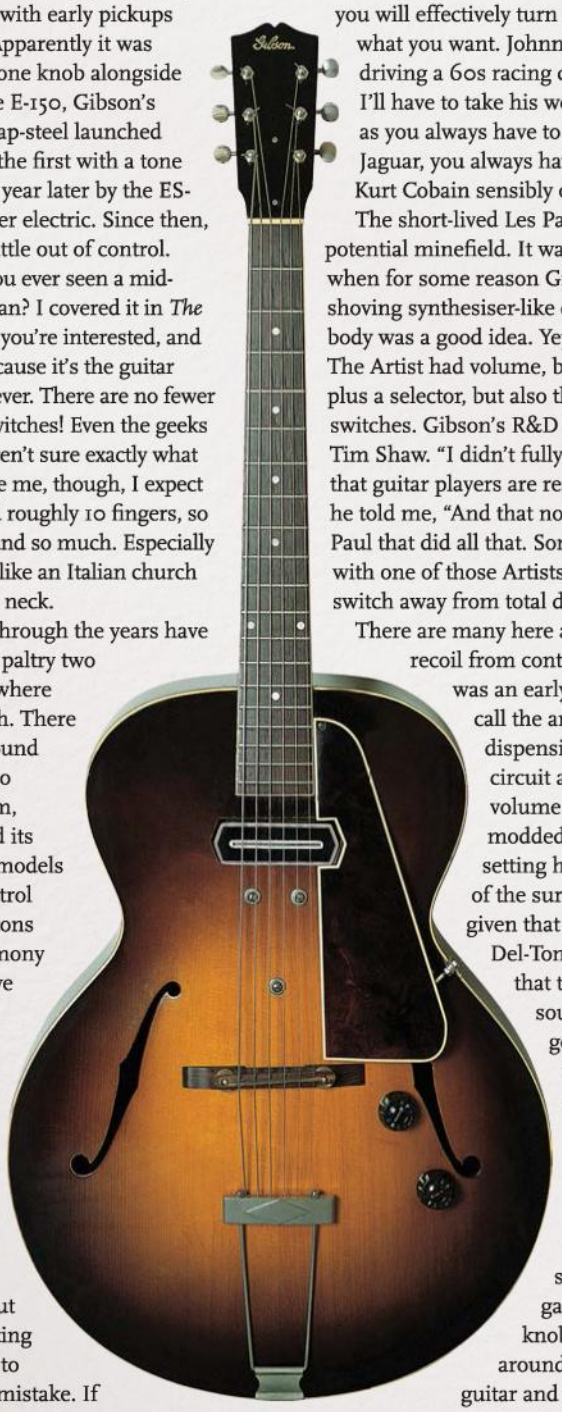
Many other makers through the years have tried to outdo Mr Rey's paltry two knobs, but have got nowhere near Godwin's approach. There was a definite trend around the start of the 60s to go multi-control. Hagstrom, for example, introduced its Standard and De Luxe models in 1959, which had control panels full of push-buttons and roller wheels. Harmony introduced its distinctive Rocket model in 1960, which had a long line of six knobs curved around the edge of the body: a volume and tone for each of the three pickups.

Then there's the Fender Jaguar, launched in 1962. Johnny Marr is a fan, but even he finds it infuriating how relatively easy it is to switch the thing off by mistake. If you, too, love Jags you'll know all about this: hit one or two of its six switches in the wrong fashion and you will effectively turn the guitar off. This is not what you want. Johnny likens playing a Jag to driving a 60s racing car around a track – and I'll have to take his word on that – in as much as you always have to watch the gears. With a Jaguar, you always have to watch the switches. Kurt Cobain sensibly opted to tape them up.

The short-lived Les Paul Artist was another potential minefield. It was made around 1980 when for some reason Gibson figured that shoving synthesiser-like circuitry into a guitar body was a good idea. Yep: it was all too much. The Artist had volume, bass and treble knobs, plus a selector, but also three tiny but dangerous switches. Gibson's R&D chap at the time was Tim Shaw. "I didn't fully appreciate until later that guitar players are really conservative folks," he told me, "And that nobody really wanted a Les Paul that did all that. Somebody once said that with one of those Artists, you were a flick of a switch away from total disaster."

There are many here among us who naturally recoil from control overkill. Dick Dale was an early leader of what we might call the anti-knob brigade, dispensing with his Strat's tone circuit and settling on a single volume control and some simple modded pickup switching, setting his controls for the heart of the surf. And ironic, surely, given that his band was called the Del-Tones. I expect Dick figured that the Del-Volumes didn't sound nearly as good. Some go much further, opting for an admirably basic single-knob and single-pickup – Tom DeLonge comes to mind – so you can simply plug straight in and play.

Perhaps you've had a similar yearning as you gaze at the massed knobbery and switchcraft around your feet, across your guitar and over your amp?



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In March 2017, just under a hundred *The Guitar Magazine* readers joined us at London's Water Rats venue to enjoy a fantastic evening of guitar and chat with guitar phenom Guthrie Govan at our first ever Guitar Masterclass event. We had such a positive response to that first evening, we're pleased to announce that, in association with Allianz, Guitar Masterclass will return as a series of three events taking place in February and March 2018, each one featuring the talents of a different hot-shot guitar player.

All three events will be held in the intimate and historic surroundings of Dingwalls in London - a legendary music venue in the heart of Camden that has played host to the likes of the Foo Fighters, The Strokes and Mumford & Sons since it opened in 1973.

First up on the slate for 2018, we'll be enjoying the company of rockabilly maestro Darrel Higham on the 22 February, followed by percussive acoustic guitar genius and YouTube sensation Jon Gomm on 7 March, and last but by no means least, all-round guitar virtuoso Guthrie Govan will be back for a second year to close out our Guitar Masterclass 2018 run.

Each event will be an informal affair, and in addition to enjoying each virtuoso guitarist playing and talking about their music and instruments, there will be the opportunity for audience members to ask questions of their heroes, and really get something unique and rewarding from the evening.

In addition to the regular tickets, a limited number of VIP tickets are available, which will give you the opportunity to meet the guitarist in person before the event begins.

Tickets for all three Guitar Masterclass events are on sale now for the special early bird price of £25 for a standard ticket and £55 for VIPs - prices are for individual classes, not including booking fee. Space at these events is limited so book now to avoid disappointment, and we'll see you at Dingwalls on the 22 February!

**To purchase tickets and for further information, visit www.eventim.co.uk/masterclass**

# OTHER ANIMALS

## These Aussie ex-pats aim to bring some light and shade back to the heavy rock sphere – and they won't be short of numbers to help achieve it...

There aren't too many nine-piece rock bands, so it makes sense that Other Animals' six guys and three girls came together in unusual circumstances. "Well it started with this party that Dave [Adams, vocals/bass/guitar] and Loz [flute/vocals] hosted in Melbourne, which is remembered affectionately as 'Crazy Sunday'," chuckles guitarist Jaron Mullholland. "The party started on Friday and ended on Monday. Long story short, it was a productive weekend; Mikey [Godde, vocals/keys] stole Dave's band and Dave stole Mikey's songs!"

And for those paying attention, yes, this is a rock band with a flautist... and also a trumpet, a trombone and an electric violin. But Other Animals are no self-indulgent Tull worshippers – they deal in big chunky hard-rock riffs and powerful soulful vocals, all set against an operatic maelstrom created by their esoteric extra instruments. What really sets them apart, however, is their knack for dynamics – with so much going on the band has learned to play with a restraint and sensitivity that allows their music to turn from majestic and ethereal to punishing and brutal on a sixpence.

"It's actually taken me a long time to learn when not to play guitar and to intentionally create space," Jaron confirms. "Which I've found is just as exciting as playing!"

You don't make music this ambitious without having something about you, and that's perhaps why the band decamped from Australia and moved to Europe in search of greater opportunities and audiences. "The best thing about Europe compared to Oz is that you can drive through five countries in one day here, whereas in Melbourne you can drive the same distance and end up at your grandma's house in Upper Ferntree Gully," Jaron chuckles. "The gig opportunities that pop up from somewhere like this are a gold mine. Plus we've got an incredible management team over in the UK who have been like family to us on this ridiculous expedition."

The "ridiculous expedition" that he speaks of has seen the band win fans all over Europe, culminating in the recording of their as-yet untitled debut album. "Madness. Pure, pure madness," Mike explains of the recording process. "I think it was nine studios across three countries that we tallied in the end. We tracked a bunch in our studios back home in Australia, then at Tricone Studios in Berlin (as well as Mikey's shipping container), and then at Yellow Shark Studios in the UK. It took some time but we got there, and we're pretty stoked with what we've come up with."

If new single *Monochrome* is anything to go by, it won't be short of a guitar hook or two – as you'd expect given Jaron's influences. "I picked up guitar at 16 and was playing in bands at high school – listening to Hendrix, Angus Young, BB King, Steve Vai, Ace Frehley and those type of dudes," he reveals, before cheekily adding. "I'm always up for guitar battle. If anyone out there knows someone giving cheap guitar lessons, hit me up!"

**Other Animals' new single, *Monochrome*, is available to stream and download now. For more information visit www.otheranimals.net**

# Fretbuzz

Your letters. This month: getting out of the house for a change, unconventional bridges and loud Fenders...

## LETTER OF THE MONTH

### Watt A Coincidence

Dear *TGM*, I have subscribed to your magazine for many years now, and the first article I turn to in every edition is always the Private Collection. In particular, Duncan Findlay's collection in the November 2017 edition was fascinating – every guitar has a purpose and it's basically a toolkit for a working musician. Duncan owns some beautiful guitars, but the one that leapt off the page at me was the 'star guitar' made for him in the 1980s by Alistair Watt. This is because I was actually in Alistair's workshop (in round about 1983, I think) and saw this guitar under construction. I am sure it is the same one, because Duncan says in the article that Alistair never made another one like it, and Alistair told me he was making it for a top session guitarist from Glasgow, so all the pieces fit.

Alistair showed me the cavity that he had routed inside the body to accommodate the sympathetic strings, and also the pickup that he had custom-wound to cover all 13 strings. I remember he also endeavoured to explain to me how the sitar bridge worked, but I fear the nuances were lost on me! He always had an infectious enthusiasm about anything to do with guitars and it was clear that he viewed this guitar as his 'magnum opus'. As I moved away from away Aberdeen in 1985, I never saw the guitar finished and only heard a few years later of Alistair's untimely death.

I have been playing guitar for the best part of 50 years, during which time I've used the services of many luthiers/repairers – some good and some not – but I have no hesitation in saying the finest craftsman I ever met was Alistair Watt. It is wonderful to see that so many years later the guitar that he built with such passion is still being used and cherished by Duncan.

**Sam Alcock**, *via email*

***TGM* Thanks for your email, Sam, and thanks for telling a little more of the story of such a unique and interesting guitar – we're thrilled that we were able to reunite you with this instrument so many years later, and that you can see it's had a good life and a good home in Duncan's collection.**

### WRITTEN A LETTER OF THE MONTH?

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**LOTM prize is subject to availability and may change*

Jon has done a great job on his T-style conversion project

### Grow Your Own

Dear *The Guitar Magazine*, I thought I'd share with you a guitar project I've been doing in instalments over the last couple of years. Sometime in 2015 I stumbled on a picture of a lovely Fiesta Red Tele with a Bigsby, and wistfully thought, "I wish I could afford something like that..." Shortly after, *TGM* Vol 27 No 02 came out, with Huw Price's detailed guide to Bigsby conversion. An idea formed: 'Why couldn't I update my old Tanglewood?' It already had a lovely neck, so would make a good base

A couple of years later, (nitrocellulose finishes really can't be rushed and need the right weather – I learned that the hard way!) my dream T-style is finished. With a set of Bare Knuckle '52s helpfully suggested by Regent Sounds in Soho, it sounds the part too. Massive thanks to *TGM*, especially Huw Price, for giving me the idea, and Manchester Guitar Tech for the paint. I got there in the end!

**Jon Heal**, via email

***Huw Price says* "Jon, I just wanted to congratulate you on a job well done. I bet it sounds fantastic with those Bare Knuckles and the colour is great. But be careful because it's an addictive hobby. Once you've figured out that if you can't afford your dream guitar, you may be able to make it yourself, there's no going back! Best wishes and keep up the good work."**

### Classics Vibe

Dear *The Guitar Magazine*, I just wanted to extend my compliments to you for your most recent issue of *Guitar Classics* [*Dream Machines*, on sale now! – Ed]. However, I did want to flag up something I noticed in your feature on the lovely '54 Gibson Les Paul Goldtop Standard. In this article, you write that the original bridge is has been replaced with a mystery unit, "possibly a Teisco from 1967" – not so!

In fact, the bridge is actually a Guild unit made by Muller in Germany, which the American company started using in 1971, called the AdjustoMatic. I know this because I'm the proud owner of two Guild guitars from the 1970s that both have this exact unit fitted – hope that clears this up!

**Joost Temme**, via email

***TGM* Thanks for clearing that up, Joost – part of the fun of getting up close with well-loved and modded vintage guitars is seeing the strange and esoteric components that were used to repair or tailor an instrument to the preferences of its various owners. Many thanks for solving the mystery!**

**HAVE YOUR SAY!** Write to us via snail mail, *The Guitar Magazine, Anthem Publishing, Suite 6 Piccadilly House, London Road, Bath BA1 6PL* or email **theguitarmagazine@anthem-publishing.com.** Alternatively, get in touch via social media on Facebook or Twitter.

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# New Music

We round up and rate a selection of this month's guitar-driven new releases

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ON The Guitar Magazine OFFICE STEREO

## U2
## SONGS OF EXPERIENCE

**Back in 2014, when U2 released *Songs Of Innocence*, Bono assured that its partner, *Songs Of Experience*, would be "ready soon enough". While not exactly *Chinese Democracy*, four years is stretching the definition of 'soon', but after the backlash around the non-consensual imposition of *SOI* onto millions of Apple devices, it makes sense that the Irish megastars took time to pause and reflect.**

It came at a good time, too – the world is a darker place now, and this informs many of Bono's lyrics here. Most notably on the Kendrick Lamar-guesting *American Soul*, which features Bono imploring, "This is a dream the whole world owns", laid upon a foot-stomping fuzzy melody from The Edge that then gives way to the album's first fist-in-the-air chorus.

But the album isn't short of moments that are precision-crafted to explode stadiums. The piano-driven *Love Is Bigger Than Anything In Its Way* sums this vibe up perfectly – it's lyrically trite, but as it builds to a crescendo of cascading delay, you can't help but picture thousands of fans singing back the 'oh, oh, ohs'. It also reminds you that, as much as Coldplay owe their careers to U2, influences can run both ways...

Elsewhere, the band demonstrate that their knack for crafting accessible rock songs continues to evolve as musical tastes change. One key example is *The Blackout*, which sees them embrace thumping EDM beats while The Edge's heavily effected guitar is sharpened to an industrial point as he deftly peppers the track with buzz-saw riffs that divert from Bono's regrettable *50 Ways To Leave Your Lover*-esque lyrics.

In among the radio-friendly unit-shifters, however, it's the mellow moments that show off the best of *Songs Of Experience*. *The Little Things That Give You Away* uses a laid-back R&B beat as the vehicle for Edge to layer lashings of trademark delay over; while highlight *Summer Of Love* is another restrained number that gives Mr Evans a chance to shine. It opens with a delicate picked refrain that punctuates the acoustic groove, getting progressively more effected before crescendoing into a majestic solo of euphoric delay, backed by Bond-esque strings.

After 14 studio albums, U2 know exactly what they do, and ham-fisted lyrics aside, *Songs Of Experience* ticks all the boxes you'd expect from one of arena rock's true aristocrats – and this time, it won't turn up on your phone unless you ask... **JG**

**7/10**

**TRY IF YOU LIKE:** *Coldplay, REM, Foo Fighters*

## Noel Gallagher's High Flying Birds

**WHO BUILT THE MOON?**

It's hard to believe that it's been nearly nine years since Oasis split somewhat acrimoniously following a backstage fight over a plum-throwing incident, but the shadow cast by Britain's last great working class band still hangs long over the group's main protagonists. Liam is back in the spotlight, shifting units with melodic throwbacks to his 1990s glory years and providing journalists with Super Hans-style moments of comedy genius while Noel returns with his third solo album in six years. However, fans of Gallagher senior's acoustic-driven anthems might just be wrong-footed by a record driven by psychedelia, electronica and glam-rock influences that features Northern Irish electronic musician and DJ David Holmes in the producer's chair. *Who Built The Moon* might not contain many football terrace singalongs, but it sounds like it was a riot to make – with several instrumentals providing the glue, it's an album best consumed in one sitting as you immerse yourself in its elastic wall of sound. Noel's guitar playing does feature heavily here, it just manifests itself in less familiar guises... **GJ**

**8/10**

**TRY IF YOU LIKE:** *Primal Scream, New Order*

## Joe Satriani

**WHAT HAPPENS NEXT**

All has been relatively quiet in Joe Satriani word in the last few years but now he returns reinvigorated and refocused, and with an all-star cast in tow. Satch has regrouped with his former Chickenfoot bandmates Glenn Hughes and Chad Smith, and the resulting album smashes together their high-octane rock with the textbook Satriani instrumental style. The rhythm section firepower is evident from the outset, and opener *Energy* is exactly that – a driving hard-rock blast that sees Satch melt fretboards in customary fashion. Elsewhere, *Catbot*'s bit-crushed lead lines show that Joe hasn't lost his affinity for sci-fi sounds, while the funky unison soloing of *Smooth Soul* is a real treat. The album does meander at times – *Looper* is a by-the-numbers, mid-tempo instrumental, while Hendrixisms of *Forever And Ever* are a tad forgettable. All this is redeemed by *Headrush* – a frenetic double-time riffathon that's *Satch Boogie* with snarling Hughes bass solo. And if you've ever wanted 'Satch does *Eruption*', the barely believable runs and hammering drums of *Invisible* are a must-listen. **GJ**

**7/10**

**TRY IF YOU LIKE:** *Steve Vai, Van Halen, Paul Gilbert*

## Calexico

**THE THREAD THAT KEEPS US**

Calexico's ninth studio album is a welcome reminder of the restless creativity of vocalist/guitarist Joey Burns and drummer John Convertino. Abandoning their native Arizona, the pair decamped to northern California, and pulled in a cast collaborators to create their rawest album yet. This is evident from the outset, with *End Of The World With You* pairing a driving acoustic rhythm with soaring lead lines. But their displacement hasn't pulled them from their trademark fusion of Latin sounds with indie-rock conventions – as evidenced by the Latin rhythms and horns of *Voices In The Field*, here paired with a wonderfully scuzzy fuzz riff. It provides an anchor for them to explore other genres – from hip-hop to 80s pop and beyond. By and large it works, although the most affecting track is one of the simplest – if you ever wondered what José Feliciano would have come up with if he'd decamped to Portland, check out the orchestra-inflected *The Town And Miss Lorraine*. **GJ**

**8/10**

**TRY IF YOU LIKE:** *Damien Jurado, Wilco, Mark Lanegan*

## Lost Horizons

**OJALÁ**

Lost Horizons is the amalgam of Simon Raymonde, founder of UK indie label Bella Union, and Richie Thomas, one-time drummer in proto post-rock band, Dif Juz. This debut album is an hour of exquisitely spun compositions, with Raymonde's crystalline Fender guitar adornments and piano arpeggios sparkling elegantly throughout. Vocals come from a wishlist of Raymonde's label stars and personal favourites. Midlake's Tim Smith floats atop a mesmeric thermal of acoustic guitar, volume swells and sweeping strings on *She Led Me Away*. Ghostpoet's soporific drawl accompanies Raymonde's cycling piano lines on *Reckless*, and Sharon Van Etten adds backing vocals to *Life Inside A Paradox*. Then there's the haunting appearance of dream-folk artist *Marissa Nadler* on *Winter's Approaching*. Raymonde and Thomas may not have made much music together in the past 20 years, but there's ample evidence here that they should make some more. **GW**

**8/10**

**TRY IF YOU LIKE:** *This Mortal Coil, Dij Juz, The Jesus And Mary Chain*

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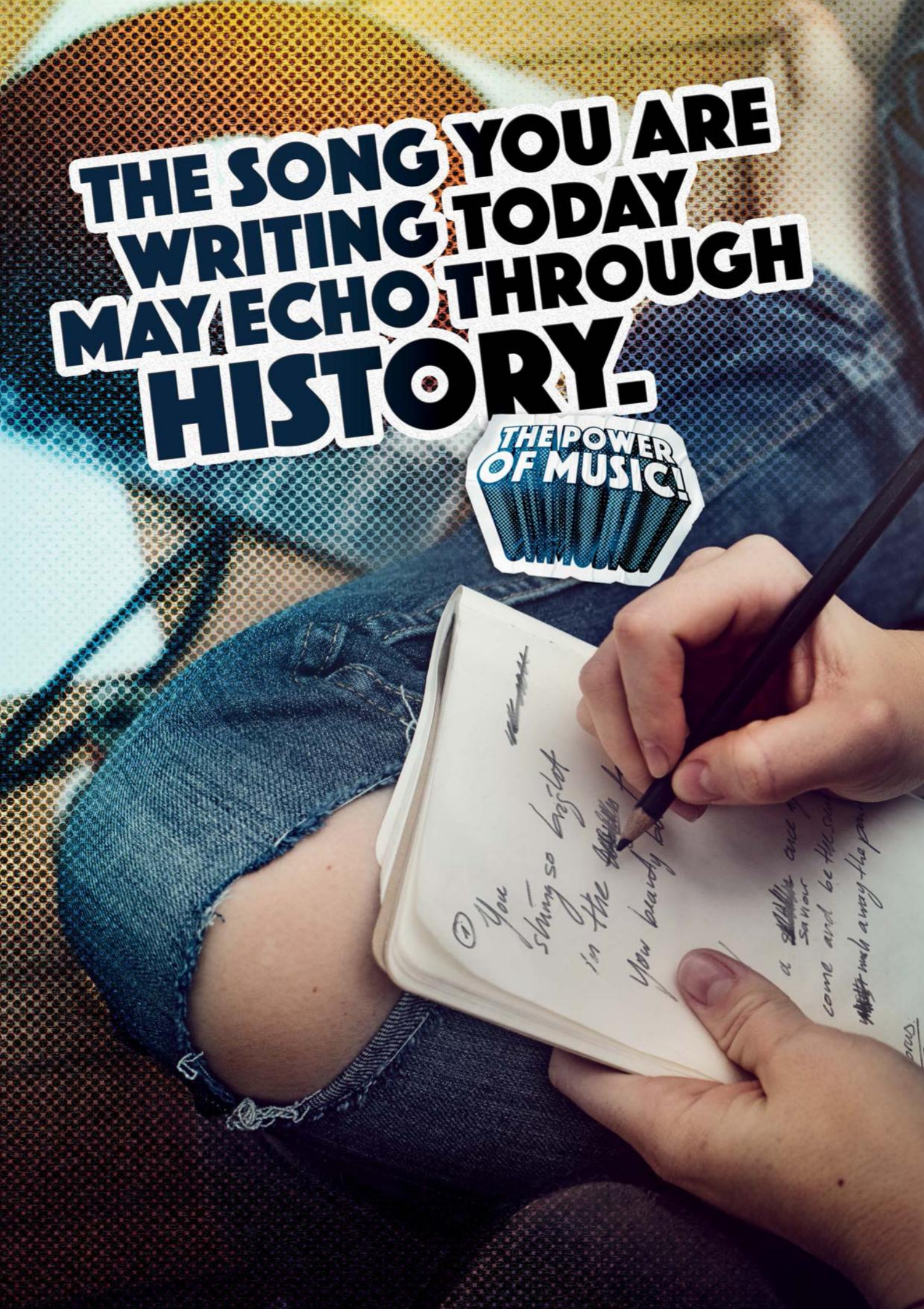
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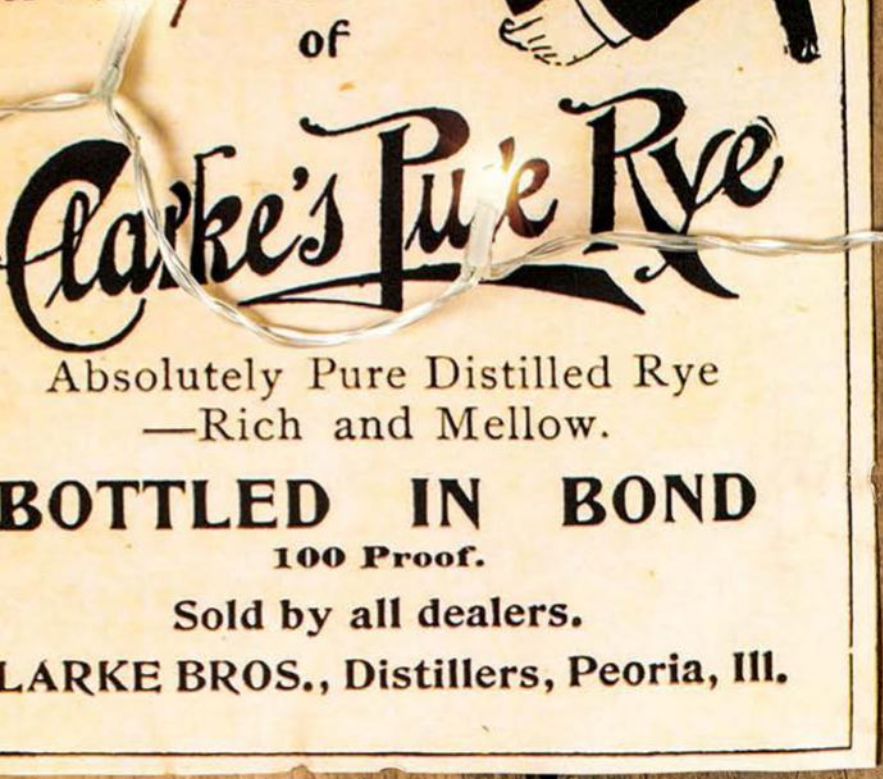
# GEAR OF THE YEAR 2017

The polls are closed, the votes have been counted and it's time to reveal the award winners and highly commended products in our annual Gear Of The Year rundown. Assuming you've torn open the bag and seen the coverstar of our special awards issue, it's not exactly a spoiler to say that the B&G Little Sister Crossroads fared rather well.

Across the following pages, the drop-dead gorgeous vintage tone machine is joined by a collection of similarly brilliant gear that should be high on your must-try list if you are shopping for a new electric, acoustic, amplifier, stompbox, bass or accessory in the coming months. Read on, then, just don't tell your other half or your bank manager...



# ELECTRIC GUITARS
## UNDER £1,000

Despite the ongoing challenges presented by the weak pound, there are still plenty of affordable electric guitars on the market from brand names old and new. If you're looking for a serious instrument on a budget, you won't go far wrong with any of these...

## FENDER DUO-SONIC HS

- **PRICE** £509
- **REVIEWED** December 2016
- **CONTACT** Fender EMEA 01342 331700 **www.fender.com**

Fender brought back the classic 1956 body shape of the original Duo-Sonic for this affordable reinvention of the company's much-loved student model. The resulting guitar mashes together the best of the Duo-Sonic's many iterations over the years – with the ultra-playable 24-inch scale neck and Custom Colour vibe of the golden era meeting a rock-ready hardtail bridge and Duo-Sonic humbucker – all put together by the dependable folks at Fender Mexico. Plug in a fuzz pedal, turn up the volume and get lost in an ocean of glorious grungey fun.

**WE SAID** "Modern-day noiseniks and old-school fans of the Seattle sound will love this; it's more robust than vintage examples, too"

## HIGHLY COMMENDED

### CHAPMAN ML3 PRO TRADITIONAL

- **PRICE** £769
- **REVIEWED** October 2017
- **CONTACT** Andertons Music 01483 456777 **www.chapmanguitars.co.uk**

**WE SAID** "With its lovely neck, ergonomic body design and custom appointments, this is a truly impressive T-type for the modern player that genuinely offers something different"

### REVELATION RTJ60M TL

- **PRICE** £289
- **REVIEWED** May 2017
- **CONTACT** Sutherland Trading 02920 887333 **www.sutherlandtrading.com**

**WE SAID** "With features inspired by several classics, this cheap and toneful offset semi covers a lot of ground in the studio and on the road"

### SHERGOLD MASQUERADER SM01-SD

- **PRICE** £765
- **REVIEWED** July 2017
- **CONTACT** Barnes & Mullins 01691 652449 **www.shergoldguitars.com**

**WE SAID** "A true rock guitar in vintage-vibed clothing, with tones that go from full-on hard rock to fat blues all the flick of a selector switch"

# ELECTRIC GUITARS
## £1,000-£2,000

The one to two grand price point is always a hugely competitive area of the electric guitar world. 2017 was no exception, with the big guns fighting it out with some impressive new upstarts...

The Guitar GEAR OF THE YEAR 2017 WINNER

## B&G GUITARS LITTLE SISTER CROSSROADS

**PRICE** £1,550
**REVIEWED** July 2017
**CONTACT** The North American Guitar 0207 835 5597
**thenorthamericanguitar.com**

When we first set eyes on the B&G Little Sister back in 2016, we struggled to find fault in what was one of the most charismatic new electric guitars we'd seen in some time. For 2017, however, the Israel-based company made the Little Sister an even more enticing proposition – by creating a more affordable Chinese-made example that took more than 50 per cent off the price but retained the addictive electric-meets-parlour acoustic vibe, and the superb tones and playability, of the Israel-made original. Quite simply, this month's cover star is one of the finest electric guitars around at any price.

**WE SAID** "B&G has cut costs without cutting quality and if you're as happy with the finish options and neck profile as we are, it's a phenomenal guitar for the money"

## HIGHLY COMMENDED

### FENDER AMERICAN PROFESSIONAL STRATOCASTER

- **PRICE** £1,399
- **REVIEWED** February 2017
- **CONTACT** Fender EMEA 01342 331700 **www.fender.com**

**WE SAID** "Professional by name, professional by nature. This is every inch a pro guitar"

### PRS RECLAIMED LIMITED S2 VELA SEMI-HOLLOW

- **PRICE** £1,429
- **REVIEWED** July 2017
- **CONTACT** PRS Europe 01223 874301 **www.prsguitarseurope.com**

**WE SAID** "With the Reclaimed Limiteds capped at just 600 guitars, demand will be fierce. Catch one if you can"

### EASTMAN ANTIQUE VARNISH SB59/V

- **PRICE** £1,769
- **REVIEWED** May 2017
- **CONTACT** Eastman Musical Instruments Europe **www.eastmanguitars.eu**

**WE SAID** "A tremendously playable single-cut with an expressive array of tones and an old-guitar aesthetic that vintage fans will love"

# ELECTRIC GUITARS
## OVER £2,000

When the sky is the limit price-wise, you know you're going to be dealing with some truly stunning and inspiring musical instruments – here's our pick of the best of the best from 2017's high-end electric guitar offerings...

## GRETSCH CUSTOM SHOP 1962 G6122 COUNTRY GENTLEMAN RELIC

- **PRICE** £7,016
- **REVIEWED** September 2017
- **CONTACT** Guitar Village 01252 726821
  **www.gretschguitars.com**

Sometimes an instrument arrives in *The Guitar Magazine* offices that we know we'll be talking about with a faraway look in our eyes for years to come, and this year no guitar has captured the imagination of the entire team quite like this incredible Stephen Stern creation. Even before plugging it in you could tell that this was one of the finest guitars the storied company had ever produced, and plugging it in was even more revelatory.

**WE SAID** "We have no doubt that Gretsch's current Custom Shop creations are some of the best guitars the company has ever made. The price of admission excludes all but the most well-heeled collectors and pros, but it's justified by breathtaking build, feel and tone"

The Guitar Magazine GEAR OF THE YEAR 2017 WINNER

## HIGHLY COMMENDED

### FRANK BROTHERS SIGNATURE MODEL

- **PRICE** £4,750
- **REVIEWED** November 2017
- **CONTACT** The North American Guitar 0207 835 5597
  **www.frankbrothersguitars.com**

**WE SAID** "An extraordinarily confident and tasteful debut from a brand that's just four years old. The Signature Model is something special"

### SETH BACCUS NAUTILUS CLASSIC

- **PRICE** £3,899
- **REVIEWED** January 2017
- **CONTACT** World Guitars 01453 824306
  **www.sethbaccus.com**

**WE SAID** "There's fierce competition in the high-end single-cut stakes, but the Nautilus is a serious contender"

### NOVO GUITARS SERUS J

- **PRICE** £2,999
- **REVIEWED** March 2017
- **CONTACT** Coda Music 01438 350815
  **www.novoguitars.com**

**WE SAID** "A guitar that surfs like a pro and struts like a Rolling Stone – another winner from Dennis Fano"

# BEST GUITAR AMP
## UNDER £1,000

**The affordable amplifier category always throws up some of the most varied and interesting products around, and this year is no different – from valve-powered monsters to cutting edge modellers and everything in between...**

## VICTORY SHERIFF 22

- **PRICE** £799
- **REVIEWED** March 2017
- **CONTACT** Victory Amplification **www.victoryamps.com**

Victory has rapidly built a reputation for affordable and well-built amps that are also small enough to haul around the place with minimal hassle, and the Sheriff is no exception. With its gold and black livery it should come as no surprise that this British-made amp is shooting for British tones, and it offers classic Marshall-style sounds in spades. Blues and hard-rock fans may never need another amp.

**WE SAID** "Victory has packed some undeniably great tones into this affordable lunchbox amp – the Sheriff thoroughly deserves its award"

## HIGHLY COMMENDED

### OLDAMPS FILMOSOUND

- **PRICE** £750
- **REVIEWED** February 2017
- **CONTACT** Oldamps 0114 258 9500 **oldamps.co.uk**

**WE SAID** "The Filmosound sounds undeniably great and offers Premier League vintage tone and hand-wired construction for the cost of a mid-priced PCB amp"

### ORANGE ROCKER 32

- **PRICE** £829
- **REVIEWED** March 2017
- **CONTACT** OMEC 020 8905 2828 **www.orangeamps.com**

**WE SAID** "An excellent-sounding amp that brings stereo effects connectivity to a sensible footprint for gigging"

### FENDER MUSTANG GT 40

- **PRICE** £195
- **REVIEWED** July 2017
- **CONTACT** Fender EMEA 01342 331700 **www.fender.com**

**WE SAID** "For the price, it's hard to fault. A cool and compact home amp that'll make you play more regularly"

# BEST GUITAR AMP
## OVER £1,000

If money is no object in your pursuit of tonal nirvana, you've really never had it so good. 2017 saw amp builders big and small pulling out all the stops in the quest to capture perfect vintage tones, and push the envelope of high-end versatility...

## TWO-ROCK CLASSIC REVERB SIGNATURE

- **PRICE** £4,299
- **REVIEWED** April 2017
- **CONTACT** Coda Music 01438 350 815 **www.two-rock.com**

With design genius Bill Krinard back in the Two-Rock fold, fans of the boutique amp builder were on tenterhooks to see what the renewed partnership would produce – and they weren't disappointed. In many ways, the Classic Reverb Signature saw Two-Rock return to what made it one of the kings of the modern boutique boom – making stunning and immaculately built big-bottle tone machines inspired by Alexander Dumble's near-mythical creations. With exceptional sonics, a wide gain range and outstanding touch dynamics, the Classic Reverb Signature is worth every penny of its top-end price.

**WE SAID** "It's undoubtedly one for the discerning and well-heeled player, but the Classic Reverb Signature is the sort of amplifier that could be a real game-changer"

## HIGHLY COMMENDED

### FENDER '57 CUSTOM PRO-AMP

- **PRICE** £2,299
- **REVIEWED** June 2017
- **CONTACT** Fender EMEA 01342 331700 **www.fender.com**

**WE SAID** "Full and fat tweed tones both clean and dirty. With the right guitar this is a stunning sounding amp"

### RIFT AMPLIFICATION TWEED 15TV

- **PRICE** £1,514
- **REVIEWED** October 2017
- **CONTACT** Rift Amplification 07480 067871 **www.riftamps.com**

**WE SAID** "With a fat and chewy midrange and sweet treble, the 15TV is a highly convincing, killer-sounding 5A3 Deluxe replica"

### STONE DEAF SD30

- **PRICE** £1,749
- **REVIEWED** July 2017
- **CONTACT** Stone Deaf Effects & Amplification 01706 882486 **stonedeaffx.com**

**WE SAID** "This is a great-sounding EL84 combo, whether or not you're ready for the futuristic functionality that's also enclosed"

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# Torpedo *Captor*

*The Compact Loadbox and Amp D.I.*

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Designed to be placed between your amp head/combo and speaker cab or even without a speaker entirely, Captor can act as a power attenuator/cabinet simulator all packed in a DI sized enclosure that features a complete set of connections and comes with the WOS II plug-in for your DAW.

www.two-notes.com

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# BEST ACOUSTIC GUITAR UNDER £1,000

We've come a long way from the maligned budget boxes of days gone by – 2017's affordable acoustic guitars can excel at home and on stage with high-quality build, well-chosen materials and a healthy dose of old-school vibe, too...

## TAYLOR ACADEMY 10E

- **PRICE** £659
- **REVIEWED** May 2017
- **CONTACT** Big Fish Studios 01206 382224 **www.taylorguitars.com**

Taylor has a well-earned reputation as one of the most forward-thinking acoustic brands out there, and so when the Californian company launched its offensive into the budget end of the market, it was no surprise to see Andy Powers' innovative fingerprints all over the Academy guitars. With a braceless arched laminate back and player-friendly armrest, the 10e has been designed to remove as many obstacles to playing enjoyment as possible for the novice guitarist – and it's equally inviting for us non-newbies, too! Also check out the Academy Series 12e Grand Concert model.

**WE SAID** "An easy-playing and fine-sounding dreadnought that sounds equally good plugged in and unplugged"

## HIGHLY COMMENDED

### AUDEN JULIA

- **PRICE** £999
- **REVIEWED** October 2017
- **CONTACT** Auden Guitars 01933 391234 **www.audenguitars.com**

**WE SAID** "Auden describes this as a 'Bench Guitar', and we can see why. High build standards, quality materials and tonewoods – all beautifully presented"

### FAITH BLOOD MOON VENUS

- **PRICE** £929
- **REVIEWED** March 2017
- **CONTACT** Barnes & Mullins Ltd 01691 652449 **www.faithguitars.com**

**WE SAID** "Good looks, easy playability, a cutaway and a decent-sounding pickup system make this a pro-grade all-round electro-acoustic at a competitive price"

### ART & LUTHERIE ROADHOUSE

- **PRICE** £399
- **REVIEWED** November 2017
- **CONTACT** 440 Distribution 0113 4433145 **www.godinguitars.com**

**WE SAID** "The Roadhouse is a well-built, great sounding parlour that's as easy on the fingers as it is on the wallet"

# BEST ACOUSTIC GUITAR
## OVER £1,000

There's a simple joy in playing a fine acoustic guitar, and 2017 found us in no short supply of top-end charmers from boutique builders and the big boys alike. It was also the year that artificial ageing in the acoustic world went overground...

## EASTMAN E1000SS/V

- **PRICE** £1,329
- **REVIEWED** August 2017
- **CONTACT** Eastman Musical Instruments Europe **www.eastmanguitars.com**

Eastman has been consistently blowing our socks off with the gorgeous Antique Varnish finishes on its electric guitars, and this compact acoustic is equally impressive. As well as having a fetchingly retro look, this guitar delivers in every other area in spades, belying its reasonable price tag. With high-quality materials, convincing ageing and truly outstanding tone and playability, Eastman has produced a winner in every respect.

**WE SAID** "Aged-finish acoustics aren't for everyone, but the playability, vibe and sheer tonal quality here are undeniable"

Guitar GEAR OF THE YEAR 2017 WINNER

## HIGHLY COMMENDED

### ATKIN GUITARS THE FORTY THREE

- **PRICE** £2,999
- **REVIEWED** June 2017
- **CONTACT** Forsyth's 0161 956 2052 **www.forsyths.co.uk**

**WE SAID** "Where it matters, Alister Atkin has got it spectacularly right. Vintage tone with contemporary playability and very accomplished relicing. A simply wonderful acoustic guitar "

### TAYLOR 712E 12-FRET

- **PRICE** £3,141
- **REVIEWED** February 2017
- **CONTACT** Big Fish Studios 01206 382224 **www.taylorguitars.com**

**WE SAID** "The 712e is not a cheap guitar, but the playability, tone and build quality are commensurate with the price – and it looks fantastic. A guitar for life"

### FAIRBANKS F20-S NICK LUCAS GOLD SPARKLE

- **PRICE** £5,750
- **REVIEWED** May 2017
- **CONTACT** The North American Guitar 0207 835 5597 **fairbanksguitars.com**

**WE SAID** "The F20-S combines many vintage Gibson characteristics with flawless playability and impressive volume and balance"

# BEST EFFECTS PEDAL

We're living in a golden age of effects pedals, and that's a fact borne out by some of the fantastic stompboxes that we've looked at in 2017...

## KEELEY
## D&M DRIVE

- **PRICE** £229
- **REVIEWED** September 2017
- **CONTACT** Andertons 01483 456777 **www.robertkeeley.com**

A meeting of minds between the boutique effects godfather Robert Keeley and the stars of *That Pedal Show*, the D&M Drive promises to offer guitar players the full gamut of drive tones – from clean boost to searing rock leads. The D&M Drive has two distinct and well-crafted tones modelled to the tastes of *That Pedal Show* hosts, Mick Taylor and Dan Steinhardt, which can be stacked and blended to taste, creating a hugely versatile gain pedal for all occasions.

**WE SAID** "A super-versatile gain pedal full of top-quality tones that could conceivably replace two or even three others on your board – if it ran on battery power, it would be perfect!"




## HIGHLY COMMENDED

### ORIGIN EFFECTS
### CALI76 COMPACT DELUXE

- **PRICE** £269
- **REVIEWED** September 2017
- **CONTACT** Origin Effects 01376 553016 **www.origineffects.com**

**WE SAID** "An all-round compressor with pristine tone and a full range of compression and limiting effects for guitarists and bassists"

### NEUNABER
### IMMERSE REVERBERATOR

- **PRICE** £219
- **REVIEWED** August 2017
- **CONTACT** Audio Distribution Group +45 6574 8228 **neunaber.net**

**WE SAID** "Just gorgeous – this has to be the ultimate compact reverb pedal"

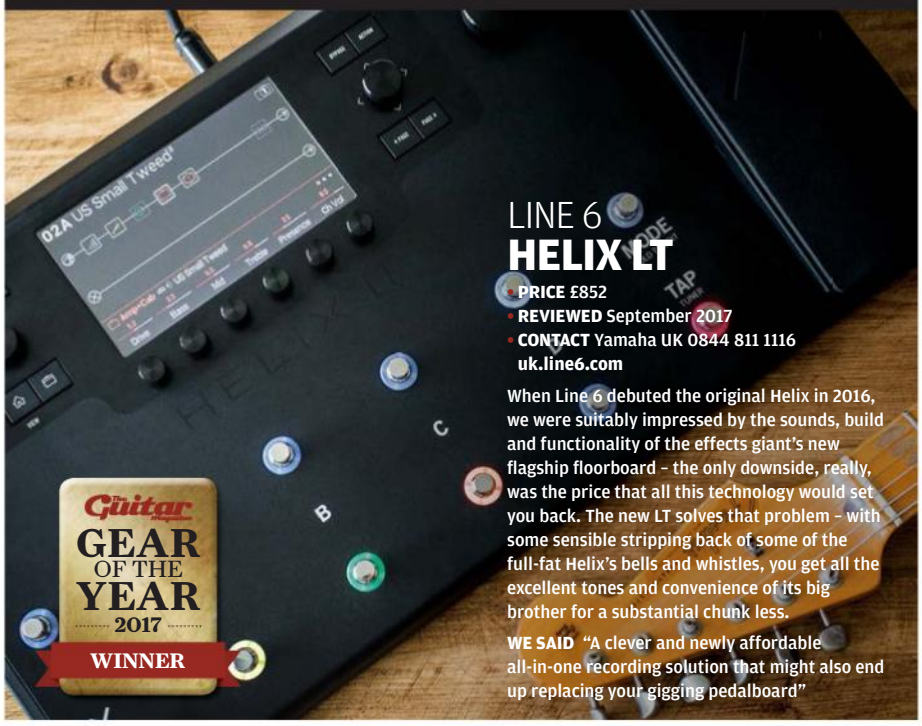
### STONE DEAF
### TREMOTRON

- **PRICE** £208
- **REVIEWED** May 2017
- **CONTACT** Stone Deaf Effects & Amplification 01706 882486 **www.stonedeaffx.com**

**WE SAID** "An absolute beast of a pedal that's not easy to keep on the leash, but sounds like nothing else out there"

# BEST MULTI-EFFECTS

Modern multi-effects processors come in all shapes and sizes, from super-powered digital behemoths to boutique devices with artist associations – here's our pick of the best of the last 12 months...




## LINE 6
## HELIX LT

- **PRICE** £852
- **REVIEWED** September 2017
- **CONTACT** Yamaha UK 0844 811 1116 **uk.line6.com**

When Line 6 debuted the original Helix in 2016, we were suitably impressed by the sounds, build and functionality of the effects giant's new flagship floorboard – the only downside, really, was the price that all this technology would set you back. The new LT solves that problem – with some sensible stripping back of some of the full-fat Helix's bells and whistles, you get all the excellent tones and convenience of its big brother for a substantial chunk less.

**WE SAID** "A clever and newly affordable all-in-one recording solution that might also end up replacing your gigging pedalboard"

## HIGHLY COMMENDED

### KEELEY
### DARK SIDE

- **PRICE** £301
- **REVIEWED** April 2017
- **CONTACT** Keeley Electronics **www.robertkeeley.com**

**WE SAID** "A great-value package of Gilmour-style effects in a small footprint that allows you to innovate as well as emulate"

### JHS PEDALS
### VCR RYAN ADAMS

- **PRICE** £259
- **REVIEWED** September 2017
- **CONTACT** JHS Pedals info@jhspedals.com **www.jhspedals.com**

**WE SAID** "A great sounding three-in-one solution for those who don't need a huge, high-tech pedalboard"

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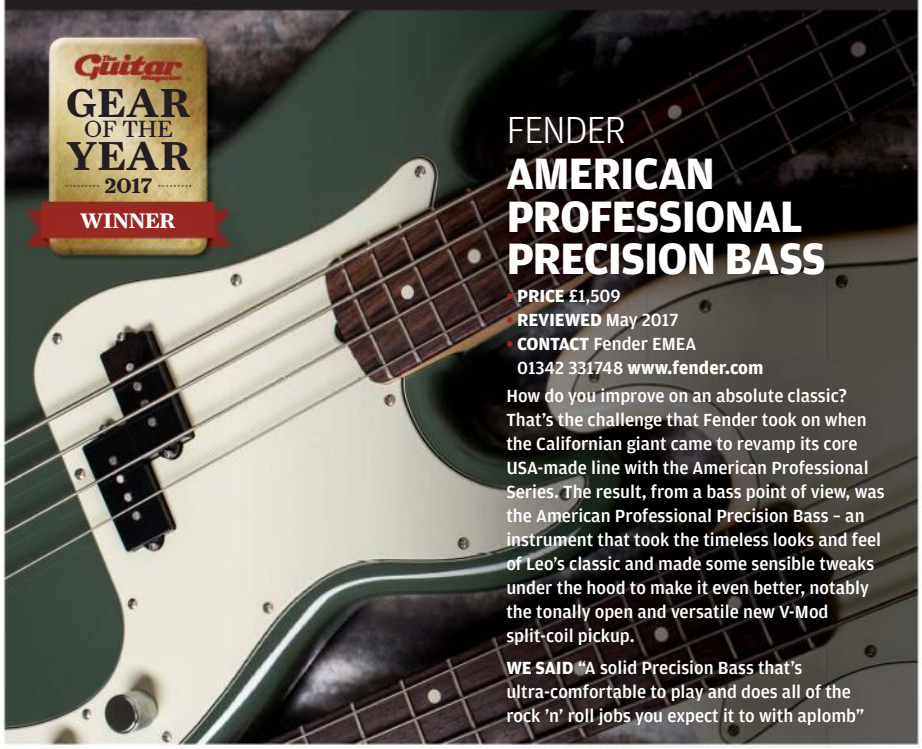
# BEST BASS PRODUCT

When it comes to taking things down low, sometimes all we need is the classics, but that hasn't stopped some brands getting inventive with their bass gear in 2017...




## FENDER
## AMERICAN PROFESSIONAL PRECISION BASS

- **PRICE** £1,509
- **REVIEWED** May 2017
- **CONTACT** Fender EMEA 01342 331748 **www.fender.com**

How do you improve on an absolute classic? That's the challenge that Fender took on when the Californian giant came to revamp its core USA-made line with the American Professional Series. The result, from a bass point of view, was the American Professional Precision Bass – an instrument that took the timeless looks and feel of Leo's classic and made some sensible tweaks under the hood to make it even better, notably the tonally open and versatile new V-Mod split-coil pickup.

**WE SAID** "A solid Precision Bass that's ultra-comfortable to play and does all of the rock 'n' roll jobs you expect it to with aplomb"

# BEST ACCESSORY

From pickups to tuners, plectrums to practice amps, we all need those little extra bits of gear that help us sound better, play better, or simply play more – here are our picks for the year

## BLACKSTAR
## FLY 3 BLUETOOTH

- **PRICE** £79.99
- **REVIEWED** June 2017
- **CONTACT** Blackstar Amplification 01604 817817 **www.blackstaramps.com**

There's an argument to be made that Blackstar's remarkable FLY 3 mini-amp is the best thing a guitar player could ever spend just south of £80 on. Quite simply, the FLY smashes the perception that a highly portable mini practice amp can't sound good – the variety of clean and gain sounds on board all sound remarkably grown up for an amp that's barely bigger than a can of Coke. The new-for-2017 addition of Bluetooth connectivity makes it an even more enticing proposition – simply hook up your phone, put it on your coffee table, and jam along to your favourite tunes to your heart's content.

**WE SAID** "The best battery-powered micro-amp in the business just got even more useful"

# HIGHLY COMMENDED

## TAYLOR
## GS MINI-E BASS

- **PRICE** £827
- **REVIEWED** August 2017
- **CONTACT** Taylor Guitars Europe +31 020 667 6030 **www.taylorguitars.com**

**WE SAID** "The GS Mini Bass is a highly portable option for guitarists or bassists that's great fun to play"

## DUNLOP
## CBM105Q CRY BABY BASS MINI WAH

- **PRICE** £119
- **REVIEWED** April 2017
- **CONTACT** Dunlop **www.jimdunlop.com**

**WE SAID** "The Mini Wah is well built, easy to use and loads of fun. Add one of these to your pedalboard and unleash your inner funk!"

# HIGHLY COMMENDED

## HOUSE OF TONE
## JAZZHOUSE PICKUPS

- **PRICE** £130 (set)
- **REVIEWED** August 2017
- **CONTACT** House Of Tone Pickups 07791 691251 **houseoftonepickups.com**

**WE SAID** "About as good as it gets for vintage Jazzmaster tone"

## TYSON TONE
## P90 53-WRAPTAIL PICKUPS

- **PRICE** $210 (set)
- **REVIEWED** January 2017
- **CONTACT** Tyson Tone Pickups 001 831 776 8692 **www.tysontone.com**

**WE SAID** "Incredible mid-50s P-90 replicas that hold their own with the genuine article"

## FANE ACOUSTICS
## ASCENSION A60 SPEAKER

- **PRICE** £214
- **REVIEWED** March 2017
- **CONTACT** Fane Acoustics 01924 224 618 **www.fane-acoustics.com**

**WE SAID** "If you need high power handling with alnico tone and dynamics, the A60 delivers on every front"

# BACK TO THE TRUTH

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Design: www.thieme-markendesign.de

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# THE SHOWS MUST GO ON

With rock legends Queen in the midst of yet another sold-out world tour, guitarist Brian May recalls life on the road down the ages, tells **SIMON BRADLEY** how the experience has changed and reveals that modern technology has improved his tone.....

The touring life of Queen dates all the way back to a gig at Truro Town Hall on 27 June 1970 – one, so the story goes, that was arranged by drummer Roger Taylor's mum – and monumental success soon followed. As they increased in size over the ensuing years, so did the venues they would play. For example on 20 March 1981 a staggering 131,000 rabid fans came to see them at the Morumbi Stadium in São Paolo, and the classic line-up's last show, the now revered Knebworth Park extravaganza that took place on 9 August 1986, was witnessed by an estimated throng of 160,000.

An obvious, and some would say insurmountable, obstacle to the continued momentum of this touring juggernaut was the passing of the incomparable Freddie Mercury in 1991 and whether the band should have been laid to rest alongside that most wonderful of singers remains a hot-button online topic. However, now comprising just Taylor and guitarist Brian May after the retirement of bassist John Deacon, Queen undertook three subsequent tours with Free vocalist Paul Rodgers before joining forces with a vocalist far closer to the Mercury mould, Adam Lambert.

"I often think that Freddie would both love him and hate him!" asserts the ever-friendly May. "Adam's a great showman and he can hit those top notes without losing any quality or power. The things he pushes himself into are just breathtaking – he's amazing, I have to say."

## Read All About It

Queen + Adam Lambert has been on the road for most of the second half of 2017 with more dates scheduled for next year, and the theme of the spectacular production is based around the 1977 album *News Of The World* and its iconic cover design by noted sci-fi artist Frank Kelly Freas that features a blood-splattered robot.

We're speaking to May whilst the band is on hiatus between the US and European legs of the trek and he brings us up to speed regarding the origin of the idea.

© Brian May Archive

Brian playing his first gig with the Red Special at Molesey Boat Club in 1966 – note the original hand-made pickups (see p68 for more)

## RED OR DEAD

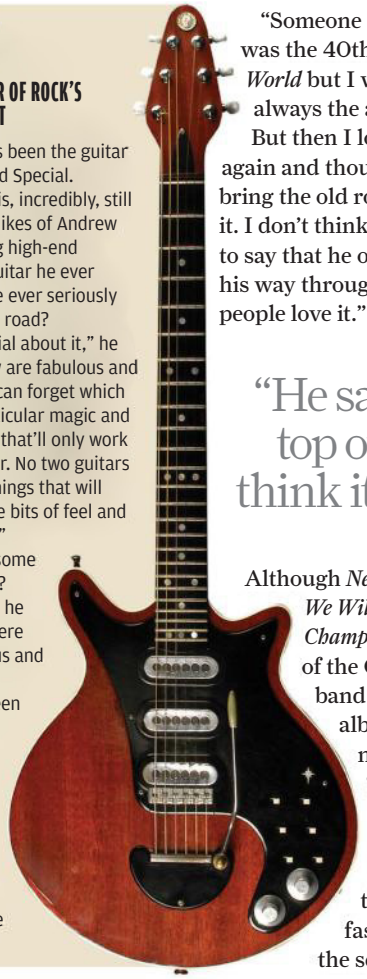
### THE EXCEPTIONAL STAYING POWER OF ROCK'S MOST RECOGNISABLE INSTRUMENT

May's constant companion has been the guitar he built with his father, the Red Special. Completed in October 1964 it is, incredibly, still going strong and, despite the likes of Andrew Guyton and Greg Fryer making high-end replicas, it remains the only guitar he ever really wants to play. So, has he ever seriously considered retiring it from the road?

"No; there's something special about it," he insists. "The copies I have now are fabulous and if I'm out there in the lights, I can forget which I'm playing. But there is a particular magic and there are certain things I'll do that'll only work optimally on the original guitar. No two guitars are alike and there are little things that will never be replicated, just subtle bits of feel and sound. It'll live as long as I do!"

But surely there have been some hairy moments over the years?

"We did have one occasion," he pauses before continuing. "There was a guy doing publicity for us and he thought it'd be amusing to pretend that the guitar had been stolen. Nobody asked me, but they put the story out and it was really embarrassing. But no, the guitar's always been kept safe by my wonderful team and I'm very grateful for that: it's treated like gold dust. It's like a piece of me, like one of my limbs – I do love that guitar."



"Someone casually said to me that it was the 40th anniversary of *News Of The World* but I wasn't that interested; it's always the anniversary of something! But then I looked at the album cover again and thought how great it would be to bring the old robot back to life, so we set to it. I don't think I'm giving away too much to say that he opens the show by smashing his way through the screen: it's colossal and people love it."

"I thought that *Spread Your Wings* was going to be a massive success with the audience because it's very much a singalong, but we didn't feel like it caught fire, so we dropped it after a few shows. It may be more of a European rather than an American thing, so it's possible that we'll consider putting it back in to see how it goes here.

"*It's Late* is an epic that takes a massive amount of concentration to perform, but

> "He said, 'You know that little box that sits on top of the amps? Well, I've lost it, but I don't think it'll matter'. That was the treble booster..."

Although *News Of The World* openers *We Will Rock You* and *We Are The Champions* have been mainstays of the Queen set for decades, the band dusted off a couple of rarer album tracks this time around, namely *It's Late* and *Spread Your Wings*. However, as May explains to us, neither made it to the final leg of the US tour and, considering the band's global stature, it's fascinating to note how organic the set list is today.

I love it," he continues. "That went really well and the reason we didn't do it on the final few shows was that we felt it was exhausting us and the audience too much. I think there's an optimum length to a show that allows you to keep the energy and it's a fine line. We're not a band that plays for four hours a night and so, in trimming and adjusting the show, *It's Late* bit the dust at the end of that American leg."

It's a spectacular and hugely entertaining production, one that most Queen fans will surely relate to and enjoy regardless of who's at the vocal mic.

## Early Daze

That's the mighty oak, but how about the acorn? At our urging, May casts his mind back to the first notable tour of Queen's career, supporting British glamsters Mott The Hoople in late 1973.

"We were very aware of making the music count," he says of the quartet's approach back then. "We were already discussing the fact that it wasn't going to be the same live as it was in the studio and that we should be maximising our contact with the audience. We wanted to be dramatic so we're talking about what we would wear, the lights, the quality of the sound, even the shape of the stage although as we were the support band we didn't have any control over it. We knew that we were building something, our dream if you like."

These days May's gear is about as reliable as it can be due to the technical advances described in August 2016's issue of *TGM*, but we can't imagine that would have been the case back in those days.

"Oh, you couldn't be more right!" May erupts with a laugh. "No, in the beginning we used to do everything, carry our own amps, the whole bit, but it was hard to find technical people who had any idea of what they were doing. I had one guy, and I'm not going to mention his name, who used to set up my amps, just two of them in those days, and when we rolled up to I think it was Liverpool he said: 'It's all looking really good but you know that little box that sits on top of the amps? Well, I've lost it but I don't think it'll matter because you can still hear it really well.' That was the treble booster and it was impossible to play without it because it changes the whole character: an AC30 is all flabby without one. I don't remember what we did but I realised I needed to find somebody who knew what they were doing to look after my gear."

As it turned out, Queen would never need to support another band throughout the rest of their career and, as the venues and audiences increased in size, so did May's wall of Vox AC30s. At its most massive the backline was composed of no less than 12 of these unmistakable 2x12 combos, with yet more ready to go as spares.

"Well, it just gradually got extended but it's the same principle. The guitar stuff got bigger because I just wanted to!" he laughs. "I think every guitarist wants 'bigger' because they want lots of sustain and fatness. But what happens is as soon as you start to play anything larger than a theatre you realise that the sound you're working off is actually not what's coming out of your amps; it's a sound that's being regenerated and fed through the monitor system. So although I'm building my stacks bigger and bigger I'm also conscious that what is really powering my sustain is the relationship with the monitors. So, to spread the guitar around, I started to have monitors all over the stage."

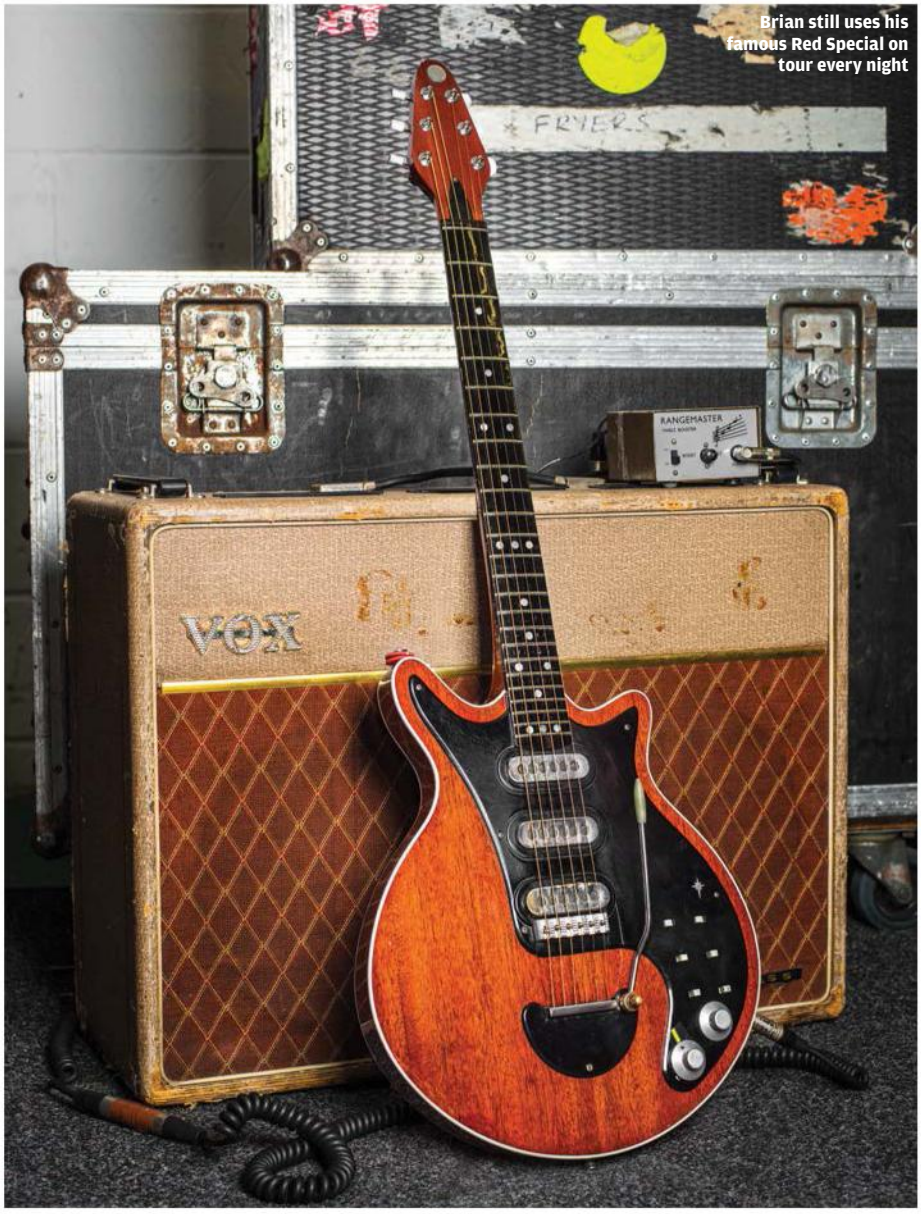
## Fat Bottomed Tone

Any guitarist will empathise with equipment worries and, as the way in which May obtains his sound puts a significant strain on already creaking amps, we can't imagine gigging in front of thousands with a backline constantly at the point of meltdown was the most relaxing of experiences.

"I used to be very uptight about it, all the way up to 1986." he concedes ruefully. "I wouldn't go on until I'd spent 45 minutes with the guitars either, re-tuning them and warming them up. Looking back, I don't think that was necessary as I had a great guy who was perfectly capable of tuning them, but I think it gave me a feeling of security. I don't do that anymore; I spend more time making sure my trousers don't fall down..."

May's core signal path has remained virtually unchanged since the very early days – his home-made guitar into a treble booster and minimal effects, then into any number of AC30s - and although he's used different boosters over the years, he doesn't feel that his sound has altered that much.

"It started with a [Dallas] Rangemaster but, if I'm honest, everything since then hasn't been a lot different," he confirms. "The thing that's really changed is the fact that I stopped using leads and got into wireless. We worked really hard at reproducing the sound it would make when you plugged in with cables and it was possible to edge the gain up a little more so you were getting a bit of extra boost. After a while I found I needed that boost through the radio: it's like an addiction to sugar! So now, when I'm in the studio and doing it the old fashioned way with cables, I sometimes



Brian still uses his famous Red Special on tour every night

© Brian May Archive

Brian puts the Red Special through its paces on the day it was finished, at the May family home in 1964

## POLES APART

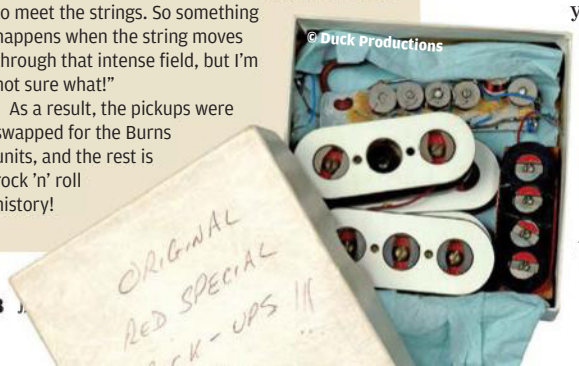
### IN A *TGM* EXCLUSIVE, WE GET OUR HANDS ON THE RED SPECIAL'S ORIGINAL HOME-MADE PICKUPS...

During the construction of the Red Special, May and his father designed and made three pickups from scratch. As one of the few failures of the entire build, they didn't work quite as expected and were replaced by Burns Tri-Sonics. Presumed lost, the original units were discovered in a drawer in the Queen archive in early 2017 and this is the first official image. Brian talks us through their birth...

"I was clear about the principle," he begins. "So I bought some little Eclipse button magnets from a place in Kingston [upon-Thames], screwed them to a block, put a former around them and wound as many turns of 50 gauge copper wire as we could get around them: my dad and I made a little winder to do that. There's a strip of plasticard around the outside, they have white Formica tops and everything's buttoned up really neatly."

"They had an amazing top end but there was one flaw," he explains. "I wanted to bend strings but there was this strange sort of shuffling noise and that got in the way. I think what happens is the north pole, which is adjacent to the south pole of the next magnet in line, draws the field in very close, but the field should really be going outwards to meet the strings. So something happens when the string moves through that intense field, but I'm not sure what!"

As a result, the pickups were swapped for the Burns units, and the rest is rock 'n' roll history!




feel as if there's not enough gain there so I'll actually use the radio."

May's backline has always been run at high levels and, these days, with his KAT treble booster already providing around 31dB of signal hike, the Sennheiser wireless systems add another 6dB along with some tonal colour. Having had first-hand experience of the rig's majestically crushing volumes we convey our surprise that it's possible to drive an AC30 any harder.

> "I didn't think we'd still be doing it at this point. It's a good, meaty show. It's as big, dramatic and powerful as anything we've done"

"It does make a difference," he assures us. "It improves the sustain, especially at the top end of the guitar, and I've become a somewhat dependant on it. We're trying to reproduce that extra kick and compression you get with an analogue system, but some of these digital systems are too good, too nice, and you don't get that compression. But I need it and we're pretty much there now."

So, there's no putting it off: the million dollar question. Is this likely to be Queen's last tour, at least of this scale? May is ready with a response.

"I've no idea," he laughs, cryptically. "I didn't think we'd still be doing it at this point. It's full-scale and it's a good, meaty show. The number 70 is quite significant; I didn't realise what it was going to feel like. I look in the mirror and think: '70? Are you really?', because inside I feel like I'm about 35, you know? It's daunting; three score years and 10 is the lifespan of a human being and everything else afterwards is bonus time."

As we say our farewells we ask May to affirm the validity and relevance of the current tour for any remaining unbelievers.

"It's as big, dramatic and powerful as anything we've done for the last 40 years," he summarises succinctly. "Those songs are alive in all of us; they're not museum pieces, which is the key, I think."

**The UK leg of the Queen + Adam Lambert European tour begins on 26 November 2017**

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# NATIONAL ANTHEMS

They're the Firebird-wielding twins at the heart of one of the world's biggest indie-rock bands, and on album seven they've embraced guitar solos. **GARY WALKER** meets The National's Aaron and Bryce Dessner to talk about *Sleep Well Beast*...

They've just secured their first ever UK No 1 album, played to 80,000 people at Glastonbury Festival – in a surreal position on the bill between Katy Perry and the Foo Fighters – and embarked on another sold-out global tour. Two decades into their career, The National have steadily ascended to a position as one of the world's biggest indie-rock bands. And their seventh album, *Sleep Well Beast*, is at times both the most and least guitar-centric in the group's catalogue.

The Ohio-via-Brooklyn band's Firebird and stompbox loving twins, Bryce and Aaron Dessner, aren't the typical rock-guitar pairing. Conjuring the intricate sonic tapestries upon which frontman Matt Berninger layers his existential lyricism and doleful wine-soaked baritone, they trade in an understated brand of virtuosity, uninterested in revisiting well-worn rock 'n' roll clichés.

## The Perfect Song

*Sleep Well Beast* is The National's most experimental record to date, and their first to contain bona fide guitar solos. Indeed, on lead single *The System Only Dreams In Total Darkness*, they cut one of 2017's most memorable guitar breaks – an outstanding moment on an album replete with glitchy electronic beats, shifting

time signatures and orchestral stems fired through pedalboards.

"We're guitar-heads," says Bryce, who studied classical guitar and later earned a masters degree in music from Yale. "It's our primary instrument. For whatever reason, the guitar has never interested us as like a blues/classic-rock guitar solo kind of thing. Maybe live, we play a lot more in that sort of solo-istic way... This record wasn't a decision to include guitar solos, they just came.

"As kids, we played in virtuosic rock bands, and Aaron has toured with Bob Weir, so we have chops or whatever, but it's never really fit in our music. On this album we were looser about things, and the guitar came in. *System...* has the biggest guitar solo we've ever done. But then there are moments like the solo in *Guilty Party* and at the end of *Born To Beg*, which are highly elaborate, constructed solos. There are songs when you don't hear a guitar at all and then when you do it's really featured."

The solo in question is a blistering rollercoaster ride that flirts thrillingly with barrelling clean off the tracks. Like much of the guitar work on *Sleep Well Beast*, tracked at Aaron's upstate New York Long Pond studio, it was recorded without pedals, straight into the amp.

"It's my 1959 tweed Champ," says Aaron. "I bought it at Chicago Music Exchange the same day I bought my 1965 Firebird, a couple of years ago. It was a good day! It sounds amazing if you turn it up. I plugged directly in with a short cable and my '63 Jazzmaster on the bright pickup. To be honest, I don't remember the day I actually did it... but it's definitely that guitar into the Champ, turned all the way up."

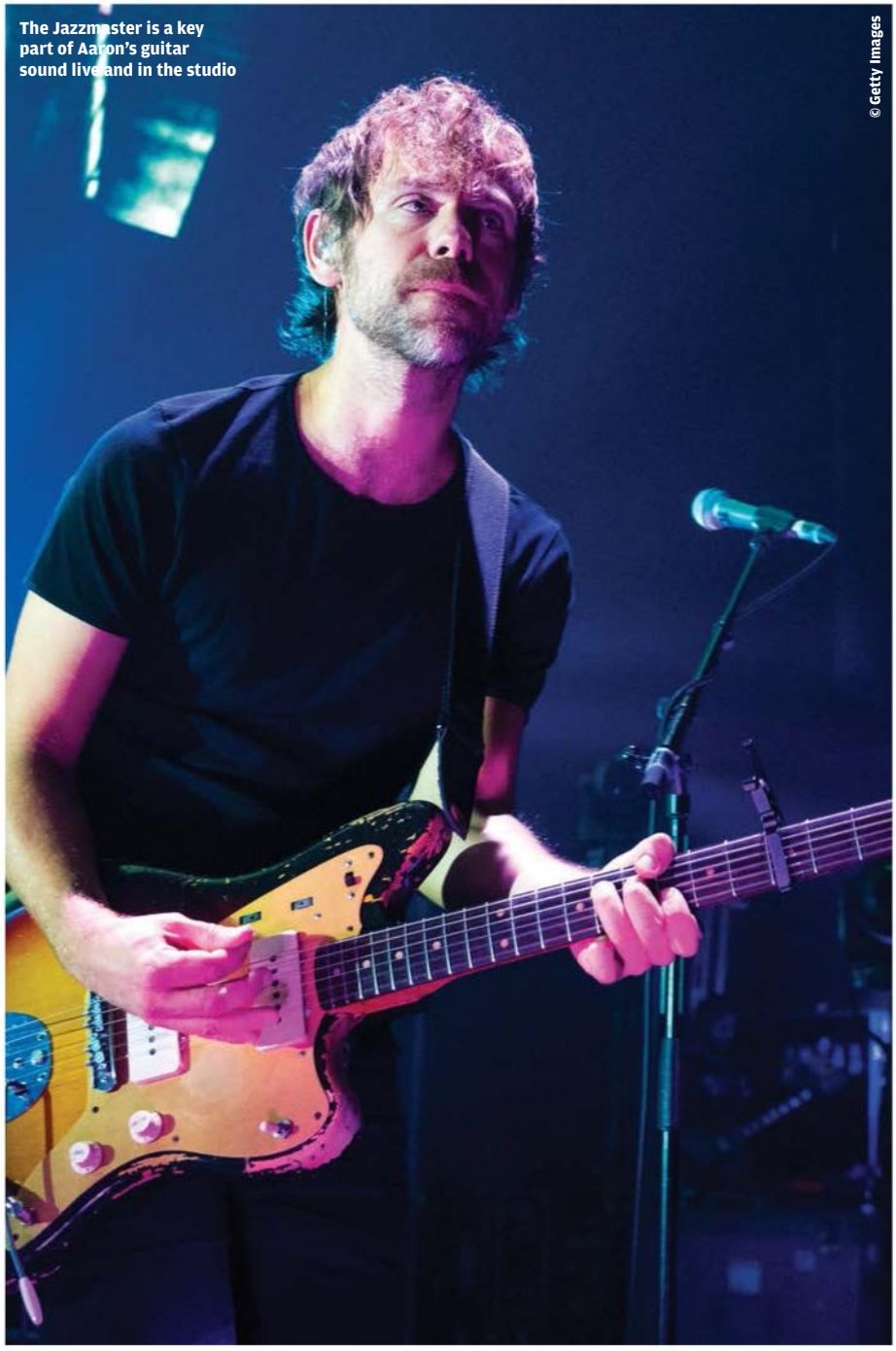
## Slow Show

The Dessner twins are the beating heart of this thinking man's stadium band – they write all the music, with Aaron handling production. It's been a slow and not always smooth passage to their current lofty position. Their first two albums, *The National* and *Sad Songs For Dirty Lovers*, sailed under the radar, and by the time of 2005 cult-classic, *Alligator*, they were struggling both to make the breakthrough and to make ends meet. Freshly signed to Beggars Banquet, it was the record that began their rise.

The majestic, brass-heavy *Boxer* followed in 2007, with Barack Obama borrowing its opening track *Fake Empire* to soundtrack his victorious election campaign. By the time of 2010's expansive and anthemic *High Violet* they were playing arena shows and festival headlines, before the sonically lush, deeply morose *Trouble Will Find Me* completed their elevation to the indie-rock big league.

Along the way, Aaron and Bryce's near-telepathic interplay has seen them become revered as two of the most interesting guitarists in a modern landscape that places more importance on textural soundscaping than pentatonic acrobatics. That mutual understanding began in childhood, growing up in Ohio with their father's collection of jazz and classic-rock records for shared inspiration. As Aaron remembers, it was a challenge from their sister Jessica that provided the initial motivational spark.

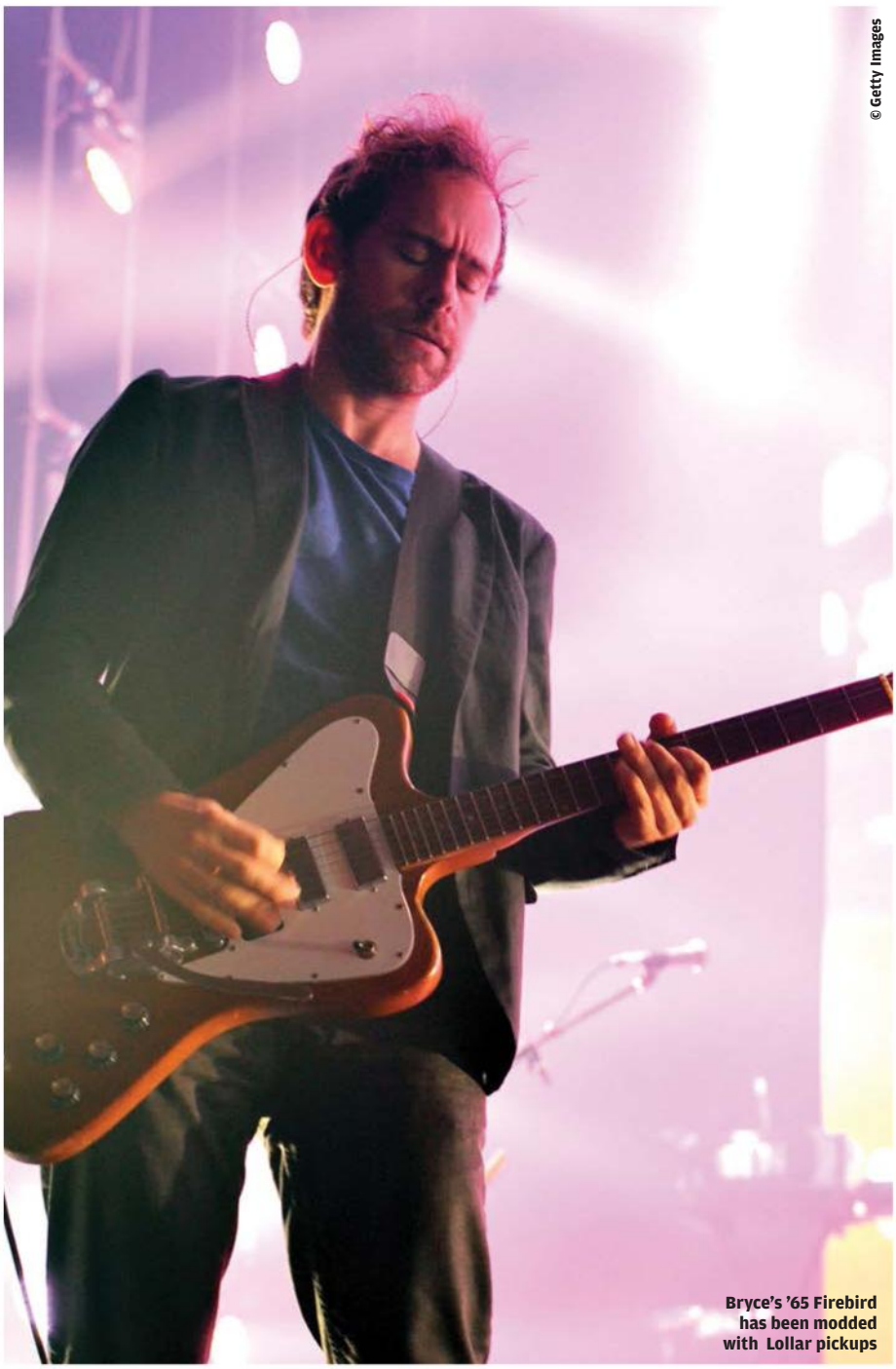
"Early on, we'd take all our dad's Beatles, Stones, Grateful Dead, Allman Brothers, The Band and Dylan records and make



The Jazzmaster is a key part of Aaron's guitar sound live and in the studio

© Getty Images

*"As kids, we played in virtuosic rock bands, so we have chops, but it's never really fit in our music"*



© Getty Images

Bryce's '65 Firebird has been modded with Lollar pickups

elaborate notes. He was like Keith Jarrett-obsessed and Gary Peacock, jazz fusion, he was into Charles Mingus...

"We'd be fighting over records and when our sister felt like being nice she'd help us and be like, 'Here's *The White Album*, now don't bug me for it anymore...' We were probably seven years old. Then, at some point, she challenged us, because there was an Allman Brothers instrumental called Jessica. She said, 'You'll never be able to play that'. We were like, 'You just wait and see...'"

## Mistaken For Strangers

Today, Bryce is one of the world's most sought-after modern classical composers, having studied at Yale under Benjamin Verdary. The veteran classical guitarist proved a pioneering virtuoso mentor, while the work of contemporary composers such as Philip Glass and Steve Reich have also fed into the Dessners' intuitive playing style. The brothers eschew traditional rhythm/lead roles, their phrases weaving together, finishing each other's sentences, in a vocal style known as 'hocket', which dates back to the 13th century.

"We spent our formative years together," says Bryce, "So there's a shared knowledge that's a powerful tool. We don't have to teach each other a song, we can walk into a room when one of us has been working with musicians for two weeks and we'll know more in an hour than the musicians, just on the basis of our shared intuition. "That's a basis that we're always trying to push. When we pick up a song together, to say, 'I'm not going to play what he's playing', and we have the agency to do that because we trust each other. On this record, we're pushing it in both more mysterious and more obvious ways. On *Turtleneck* you can hear it, I'm on the left, he's on the right and we're playing against each other, that kind of duelling guitar solo."

"A lot of our good songwriting in the past, there's harmonised guitar," adds Aaron. "I might be me playing fingerpicking bass [notes], and Bryce will be playing off me, or playing a harmony, but it almost sounds like the same person playing one part. "We'll take that further in some cases. On *Sleep Well Beast*, the pianos are playing off each other by an eighth note. Then there's other elements, where we're creating this lattice work of notes."

"Because we aren't a guitar-rock band, there's no hierarchy about who's playing rhythm or lead," adds Bryce. "Those kind of old paradigms don't interest us."

## Hard To Find

What does interest the Dessners, however, is hip vintage gear, with both twins having 1960s Firebirds and Jazzmasters in their guitar collections.

"I have a weird Frankenstein '65 Firebird I rebuilt that has Lollar pickups in it," says Bryce. "Ben Lanz, our trombonist and keyboard player, is a gearhead and sleuths around on eBay. I'd been wanting a Firebird and he found this guitar covered in stickers and bad paint and stripped of its electronics. But he could tell it was a vintage instrument because the brass electronics plate was still in it.

"The person was selling it for $200 or $300. I stripped it, and found the serial number. The body alone is worth quadruple

and more than that. That's my primary tour guitar and is on the record."

Bryce also used his '65 Jaguar during the *Sleep Well Beast* sessions, with Aaron mainly trusting a 1970s Telecaster, as well as his own Firebird.

"I've got a 1972 Telecaster and a lot of the solo lines I'm playing on the record are that guitar," says Aaron. "I really fell in love with it. Live, I generally split between my '63 Jazzmaster and the '65 Firebird. We both have Firebirds. Bryce's is the more beautiful, interesting adaptation and mine's a classic old-school all-original Firebird.

"We have a great friend in LA, Reuben Cox, who has a store called Old Style Guitars. He customised two early 60s Silvertone acoustics for us with little lipstick pickups, and we used them on all kinds of things. You can hear it on *I'll Still Destroy You*. We have a '65 mahogany Guild, the model that Nick Drake plays...

"The amps we used on the record were that 1959 Fender Champ... there's a late-60s Fender Princeton and a mid-70s Music Man with one 12-inch speaker, that has a great gain channel. And there's an Ampeg Gemini, an old Fender Bassman."

## Little Faith

Those album sessions began immediately after the end of 2014's *Trouble Will Find Me* tour, which saw the band headline London's 20,000-capacity O2 Arena, with Aaron building the Long Pond studio, named after the lake at the Hudson Valley house he calls home when he's not at his main base in Copenhagen. They also took in sessions in Berlin and Paris – where Bryce now lives. The Berlin work was the most experimental and electronic in the band's career, with the Dessners and friend Justin Vernon, of Bon Iver, curating the Funkhaus collaboration of 80 musicians, including members of Wye Oak and Alt-J. With the demos of *Sleep Well Beast* in the bag, they invited these disparate musicians, notably the German electronic act Mouse On Mars, to improvise over the playback, infusing the record with its adventurous electronic spirit.

"There was never a conscious decision to go more electronic, it was literally that we wrote so much music," says Aaron. "Some of it was very natural, us in a room playing, and others were experimenting with all kinds of software, drum machines, samplers and using them as compositional tools. It wasn't meant to be leaving behind analogue sounds."

"We're never deliberate in terms of we don't make concept records," adds Bryce. "There was a feeling that we'd never really captured the sound of the band live. The big difference with this record is Aaron built a studio, where we're finally able to work all together in a non-pressurised environment. That did lead to a looser recording atmosphere. There is a more experimental, more architectured sound, but also there are songs like *Turtleneck* and *Day Or Die* that are all of us playing live.

"This process was a lot more fun. There was room for everyone, we all enjoyed being there. Our past records, at least the last few, even when we were living in the

**Aaron's pedalboard mixes select boutique boxes with trusted effects staples**

© Evan Middlesworth

**Bryce's 'board is fittingly similar to his brother's, but with a few key differences, notably a Klon KTR**

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*"We're guitar-heads, but the guitar has never interested us as a blues/classic rock guitar solo kind of thing"*

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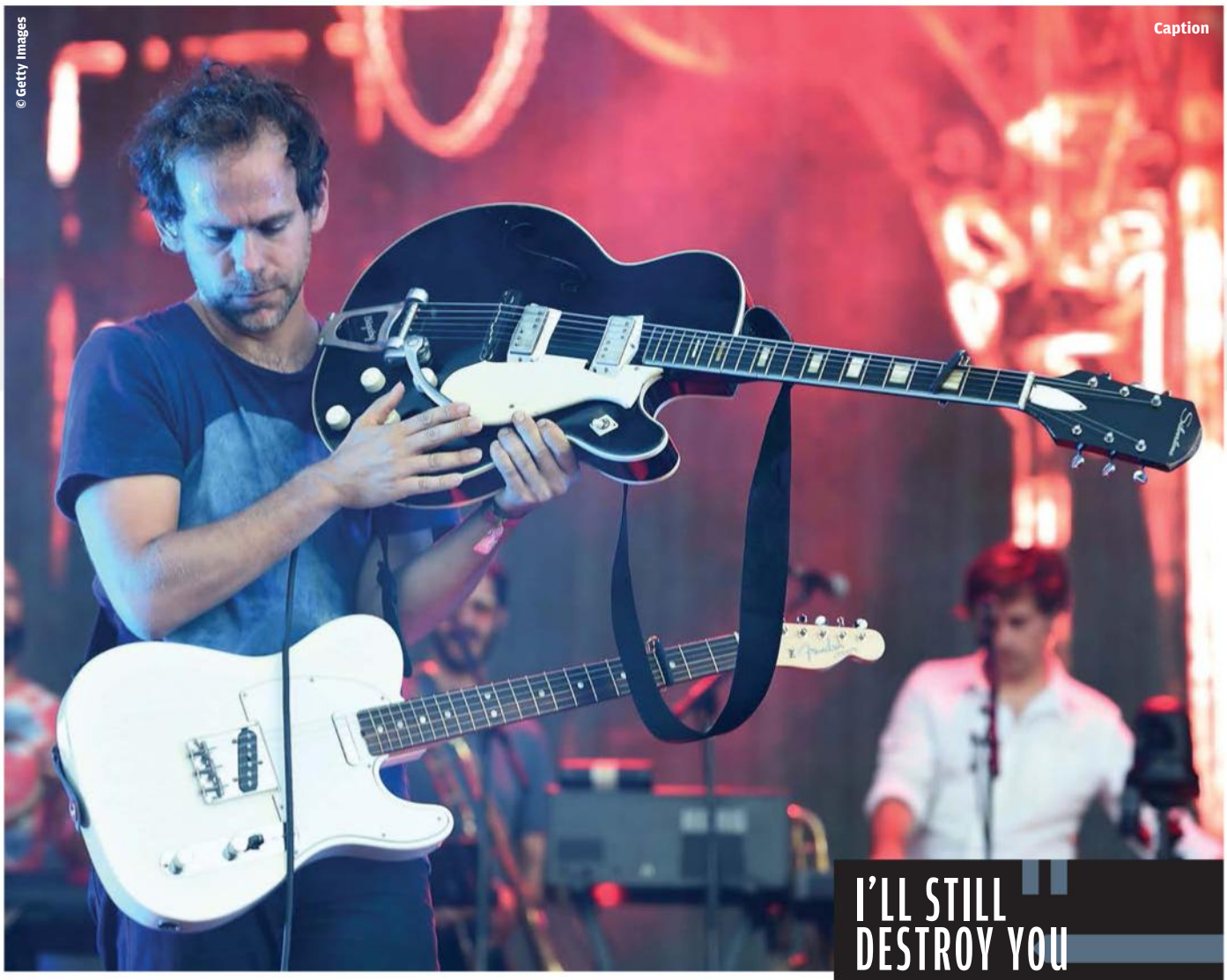


same city we were more separate. This time, Matt really enjoyed being there and spent a lot of time with us, which was really healthy."

"As a band, we tend to be quite open in our process," says Aaron. "This goes back to how Bryce and I grew up playing music, always in the same room, and then our friends were round... we were never alone writing a song. We've always had collaborators. Early on, it was Padma Newsom, Sufjan Stevens, Richie [Reed Parry] from Arcade Fire, Justin Vernon, Thomas Bartlett, and all these people have really influenced the music.

"All that stuff feeds in, and we're definitely not the kind of band to be in love with our own shadow. We're still pretty critical and self-aware. It's not like we think we have the best guitar tones, or best anything, we're just trying to make great albums we can believe in, whatever it takes. Whether that's writing with other people, trying something totally new, or building something up and knocking it down – we're pretty restless as people and I think that ends up pushing you forward."

## Sea Of Love

With *Sleep Well Beast* topping many 2017 album of the year lists, The National are going from strength to strength, and have already booked their largest headline shows yet for June 2018 at London's Victoria Park, with The War On Drugs in support. It feels as if, after an early career that saw them struggle for recognition while peers such as The Strokes and Interpol made immediate breakthroughs, The National have played the long game – and won.

"I think there is definitely a sense of 'we earned it'," reflects Aaron. "Nothing came easily, we didn't compromise, we never benefited from any hype. It was hard and we put in a lot of work, craftsmanship and obsession. I wouldn't say it's myopic, but it takes a long time to make records and it took us a long time to become a good live band. I don't know how many shows we've played, but it's thousands and we've earned the right to enjoy this.

"It's humbling when you find yourself in front of 80,000 people at Glastonbury and you're like, 'Really? Our awkward little rock songs?'. We used to play in basements and attics for three friends, and for quite a long time it was just a small thing, but we kept at it and at some point we started to have this drive and really put our heads down to make something great."

## I'LL STILL DESTROY YOU

**One guitar in the Dessners' mouthwatering collection gets something of a raw deal. Watch The National live and, if they play the song *I Need My Girl* from *Trouble Will Find Me*, you'll find Bryce dropping a Silvertone on its headstock to generate blooming feedback. It's the guitar's only role in the live set. But as Bryce tells us, it's an instrument with a rich history. "It's a Silvertone that I bought at Chelsea Guitars in Manhattan," he explains. "It's one of those guitars you could buy in Sears. It's early-60s and it cost barely anything, but it has these beautiful little mini-humbuckers in it and sounds beautiful. The intro riff on *Brainy* is played on that guitar, and in fact almost everything on *Boxer* I played on that guitar. I use that guitar a lot for controlled feedback experiments. I actually have two of them now. It looks mean, but I'm pretty gentle – I don't drop it that hard!"**

**The National's new album, *Sleep Well Beast*, is out now on 4AD**

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# Anyone Can Play Guitar

For over three decades, **Ed O'Brien** has been the guitar glue in Radiohead. His knack for unusual sounds has remained a constant as the band have pushed boundaries, but now he's turned his attention to inspiring the next generation with a new Fender guitar – and it's definitely not a signature model...

Story **Josh Gardner**

As we step into the London rehearsal studio where we'll be chatting to Ed O'Brien, the affable 49-year-old utters a sentence that raises the stakes before we've even got our recorder out: "First things first, sit and have a go..." He gestures to a stool in the middle of the room where, set up in front of his favoured Fender Vibro-King amp and in pride of place, is the reason we're here today – the brand new Fender EOB Sustainer Stratocaster.

O'Brien is clearly excited to see four years of work finally come to fruition... but we've all been in that situation when we're put on the spot and every bit of guitar skill we've ever had dribbles out of our ears. Now imagine that feeling when you have the 6'4 frame of a guitarist from the most influential British band of the last 20 years watching, waiting for your feedback... We just about manage to bash out some noodling, noting the guitar's reassuringly meaty neck and unconventional pickup layout before gratefully handing it back to a man who is much more qualified to handle such a unique instrument.

Firing up our voice recorder we sit down for something we're much more at ease with – talking nerdy about guitars, and one guitar in particular. The EOB Stratocaster is the first piece of signature Radiohead gear ever... well, we say signature, but from the off Ed is keen to point out that's not what this is:

"There's no signature on it. It's a co-design [with Fender]," he explains. "I had no plans to co-design an amp or a guitar or anything... I had a dream! I had a dream one night four years ago, I woke up and was just like, 'This guitar needs to be made'."

## Everything In Its Right Place

You can read our review of the EOB Strat on p90, but a quick look at the spec sheet confirms this isn't your average Strat – the mini-toggles where the jack socket would usually be, the humbucker in the bridge, and the Sustainer pickup in the neck position make this an unconventional proposition – but as much as this is a guitar that Ed takes on stage every night, the reason for its creation is less about him, and more about spreading the gospel of boundary-pushing electric guitar.

"I felt like this guitar had to come out," Ed reiterates. "I know that sounds a bit strange but I felt like it could be inspiring for a lot of guitarists. That's the only reason I wanted to do this – to see people use it. I'm hoping because of the price range, keeping it under a grand, it might be their first serious guitar. You could put it in the hands of some teenager and they're going to do extraordinary things with it and that's what I'm excited about – people expressing themselves."

In three decades of creating revolutionary soundscapes in Radiohead, Ed has used almost every classic guitar you can think of, but the Strat has been a constant bedrock, almost all the way back to the beginning.

"My second ever guitar was a Squier Strat," he recalls. "My first guitar was a Westone Spectrum DX, and then a year later I got a >

Squier Strat. I had that until it got nicked in '95, so I played that on our first two records. It was affordable – it was £189, I couldn't afford a Fender Strat, but to me it was as good as... it could do the job!"

Generations of guitar players have been seduced by the Strat's futuristic lines, and Ed is no different. "It's a very feminine guitar – it's got lots of curves and edges," he enthuses. "Les Pauls and Teles are more masculine, and I love the femininity and the curves and the contours of the Strat. And obviously the sounds – three pickups with five different ways to use it... there's something very primal about that. It just sits in there right, and you play it and it's just like... yeah! In many ways I wish I didn't love such a perennial and quintessential guitar, but I just do! I wish it could be some kind of Silvertone thing that I loved – and I do love Silvertones – but this is the thing that I love, I'm just drawn to it."

"I don't have that," he affirms. "I love people like Hendrix, Stevie Ray Vaughan and Jeff Beck... and they're extraordinary players, but I haven't venerated the equipment they used. I like old and new, and I try not to be snobby, because I think some people can be quite snobby about new gear. If it's good it's good, I don't care how old it is.

"So I loved the Lace Sensor pickups, they really worked. That whole era of grunge and stuff, they were fantastic guitars back then, because of the high output and the preamps – they sounded *amazing* with shitloads of distortion. They were great with effects as well – real clarity and focus. It cuts through doesn't it? And the extra bits you got with [the Clapton Strat]: I loved the preamp – I *loved* that! And I loved the EQ on it, too."

> "I love the curves and contours of a Strat... there's something very primal about that. It just sits in there right, and you play it and it's just like... yeah!"

### All I Need

After his Squier Strat was stolen, Ed replaced it with a pair of Fender Eric Clapton Signature Strats – an unconventional choice given that his Squier was basically stock, and the EC model of the time sported Lace Sensor pickups and built-in active electronics, but as with his guitar style in general, O'Brien has never been one to obsess too much over vintage accuracy.

It was these EC Strats – which were heavily modded by Ed's original tech, Pete 'Plank' Clements, with Sustainer pickups among other things – that formed the basis for the EOB Stratocaster. If space and budget had allowed it would have been even closer. "When we started I wondered if we could get the preamp in here, too," he recalls. "But it was going to be too much. But the idea of having that in there was really tantalising."

The EC's active pickups also informed the pickups on the EOB guitar, leading to the unconventional pairing of a Seymour Duncan JB Jr in the bridge and a Texas Special in the >

The EOB Strat features a Sustainer pickup in the neck and humbucker in the bridge

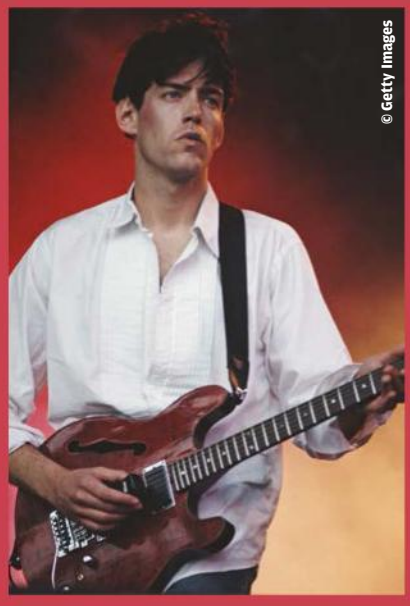
## WALK THE PLANK

***Perhaps Ed's most unique instrument is a Rickenbacker-meets-Gibson hybrid model built for him by his former guitar tech. Though the original was stolen, Plank 2 is still an essential part of Ed's touring rack today, because nothing sounds quite like it...***

**"It was the winter of 1993 – we'd just finished touring *Pablo Honey* and Pete [aka Plank] started working for us that summer," Ed recalls. "In Oxford he was like the big tech, he was the guy, he'd been out with Malmsteen, with The Kinks – everyone. Him and I struck up a really good friendship, and I spent a lot of time with him when we were off the road. He built guitars, and so I said one night, 'Do you fancy building me a guitar...?' and he was like, 'Yeah alright!'**

**"I didn't have a 335 at the time, and I wanted a 335 neck because I'd felt one and I loved it, but I wanted a Rickenbacker body. In the end the neck didn't become anything like a 335 – it was a lot chunkier! We'd just started rehearsing for *The Bends* and he was working away – he put EMG pickups in... but it had real character to it. It then got stolen with all our gear, and he made another one for me. So round the time of *The Bends*, I was playing the Rick, my Squier Strat and the Plank – I played it a lot on *The Bends* Then on *OK Computer* was the Rick, the Clapton Strat and Plank 2.**

**"For *Climbing Up The Walls* and *Just* I have to always take it out, it's the guitar that's just the best for eBow, it's got this certain sound. It's a short-scale neck and my part in *Climbing Up The Walls*, so much of that it's stuff up here, [picks the strings behind the nut on his Strat] those harmonies are only on that neck, and they're kind of integral to the feel of the song. So I always have to play that guitar! It's the ultimate character guitar. I could probably use it a LOT more than I do, but... you just get other guitars!"**



© Getty Images

Ed spent four years working with Fender to design the guitar

middle position. "They're pretty high output – that's what I wanted them to be," Ed reveals. "I didn't want a low-output classic Strat sound – I wanted it to be more like the Lace Sensor, a bit more punchy. I play it a lot on the bridge pickup so I wanted something a bit fatter, and in the middle, the Texas Special sounded great because I wanted something in-between. It's got a bell-like quality to it. I kept on saying to Alex [Perez, the Fender Custom Shop designer who built the prototypes with Ed's input], 'There's a punch but a neutrality about a Lace Sensor' – almost like you don't feel like it's the sound of a Strat, and it works great with distortion and effects."

## Where I End And You Begin

Ed has been refining the EOB Sustainer Strat on the road, but as anyone who has followed the band's constant evolution over the last two decades will have noticed, he's had to adapt and expand the way he plays the instrument as they've pushed further into areas that are very far away from guitar-driven rock 'n' roll.

"There's no reverence for the guitar," he chuckles of his Radiohead bandmates. "I love the guitar, but it's not like you put a guitar on there for the sake of it. So a lot of what I've been trying to do in the last 10 years is make sounds that go against that. I have to prove myself – it's a good challenge! But there's definitely a bit of a stigma for the guitar!"

This is reflected in the way the dynamic between Ed and his guitar collaborator Jonny Greenwood has changed, as the latter has moved away from the instrument to focus on orchestration and other avenues. "I love the guitar and I get my sounds from guitar, so that's where I do my exploring – through pedals and guitars and stuff like that," he explains. "Jonny, because he's got all the orchestration and the instruments, when he's searching for sounds he goes for other combinations – that's where he goes."

> "When we were at school Thom was the shit hot guitar player. He was really great. Neither Jonny nor I played"

Ed and Jonny have rightly got plaudits for their influential and unique guitar playing over the years, but it's easy to forget that Yorke's playing was equally important, particularly in the early days of the band – in fact, when they were all friends in school, it was Thom who was leading the way.

"When we were at school Thom was the shit hot guitar player," Ed reveals. "He was really great. Neither Jonny nor I played. Thom is a great rhythm player – his acoustic playing is just phenomenal. All the stuff that he does with his fingers on *Reckoner* and stuff like that... And Jonny, obviously, he's known as a great guitarist, and he is – he's a great lead player, and again, a great fingerpicker."

## Like Spinning Plates

Anyone who's played in a band with more than two guitarists in it will know how hard it is to make yourself relevant, and before Ed could get on with the business of selling over 30 million albums, he had to find his place in Radiohead's guitar triumvirate.

"My role on the first two albums was the choruses," he admits "Distortion, double up [parts] for a three-guitar assault... and then it was trying to find a place, much as a keyboard player in a band might do. Thom and Jonny used to write a lot together as well, so around the time of *The Bends* and *OK Computer* you'd come into rehearsal and the guitar part had basically been worked out. And the guitar parts weren't straight-ahead either – Thom's

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Ed putting one of the first production models of the EOB Sustainer through its paces

rhythm stuff certainly wasn't straight-ahead – they were really interesting inversions.

"But by that time my playing had got better and more confident, and what I was able to do was find space. Take *No Surprises* – Thom played that riff on an acoustic, and something about it reminded me of childhood – so I put the capo up on the 15th fret so that it sounds childlike, almost... and then the rest of the riff came from that, so once the sound came, that informed the part. It was about finding the right sound.

"I didn't really like our sound that much around *Pablo Honey*, I liked it in terms of it being aggressive and visceral – the gigs were great! But in the studio it was really fucking boring! But by the time *The Bends* came around, it started to get into the territory I'd always felt naturally aligned to – the sonics, the atmospheres and the space. I love space in music, I love not playing! When we did the first album literally everything was taken up, but by the time we did *OK Computer* there was a lot more space in the song – things were breathing, parts could weave in and out, and that's where I'm happiest. I love the aggressive thing, but not the whole time – you can punctuate and annunciate, it's like light and shade.

"For instance, *OK Computer* had a lot more piano and Rhodes – so one of Thom or Jonny would play keyboards, and then there was a lot more space. People know that the struggle with three guitarists in a band is, 'Well where do you find the space?!' So if you play different instrument it will create the space. And also... take a fucking rhythm guitar out of the song – often you don't need it! It's taking up a whole area of frequency. Like, Curtis Mayfield, brilliant – but we're not all Curtis Mayfield! Let the bass and the drums hold the rhythm down and bring in other stuff! So for me, taking out the rhythm guitar was a big thing and really helpful."

> "By the time we did 'OK Computer' there was a lot more space in the song – parts could weave in and out, and that's where I'm happiest"

## Exit Music

Being the guitar player in a band where the guitar isn't always leading the way in a conventional sense is in many ways the perfect background for someone to create a new guitar for a world where pop music and guitar don't always go together in general.

"It's not front and centre is it?" he chuckles. "But it's not in response to the current pop scene. The current scene... it is what it is. It's just literally putting it in the hands of people and to go, 'Have fun and see what noises and sounds you can make from this. And if you can make them musical and make them into a tune, brilliant, and if not... doesn't matter!' It could be used on soundtracks and have all sorts of applications.

"It's for other people – that's what I'm excited about. So colour wise, I was like, 'I really like white... what's the colour that sells the most?' 'White' Great! Because it looks great, but I want people to get this – because musically I think people are going to have a lot of fun with this, and I think they can do some really extraordinary things – that's what really interests me."

## FUN BOX

**Over the last few decades Ed's appetite for new and interesting effects has seen him experiment with anything he can get his hands on, and it's no different today – get him started on what inspirational effects have found their way onto his board recently and he takes some stopping...**

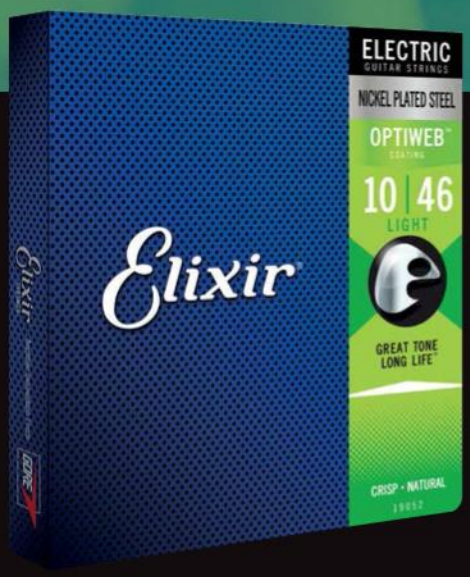
**"I've got this Kingsley Page pedal made by Simon Jarrett at Kingley Amps, he's a Brit who lives in Vancouver," he enthuses. "It's got a little valve in there, a 12AX7, and it just sounds great . I've had two of them out live. I always used to use a Klon to fatten the sound, but this does it in such a lovely, valvey way. The two stacked sounds like really driving an AC30, so I love that.**

**"There's one extraordinary pedal that Ryan of Hologram Electronics in Knoxville, Tennessee makes – it's called the Infinite Jets. It's like a guitar synthesiser thing... I'm making a record with Flood [aka UK producer Mark Ellis] and he and I were in my tiny room at the top of the house and I said, 'Oh check this pedal out'. Cut to two hours later and we've just been playing it back and forth, and he says, 'I want one!'**

**"I think we're living in a golden age – the boutique guys out there are amazing. People are really nicely nerdy about this stuff aren't they?"**

"They are bright enough to make even the darkest pickups come alive."

- Chris Loeffier, Harmony Central

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Neil Haynes with some of Guitar & Bass Build's latest creations at the company's fully featured workshop in Oxfordshire

*Talking* Shop

# BUILDING BLOCKS

## The Guitar Magazine team pays a visit to the Guitar & Bass Build workshop...

Like many luthiers we've encountered over the years, Neil Haynes' relationship with woodworking began in college, and soon led to the fine precision work of high-end cabinetry. Music was a big part of his life, too, of course – he had begun playing instruments at the age of six and this soon blossomed into a lifelong passion. Crafting his own guitars and basses was a logical next step, and it's something he's now been doing for two decades.

Haynes is the mastermind behind Guitar & Bass Build, a company based out of an impressive workshop in Oxfordshire that offers a range of products and services: from blanks and templates for budding guitar-makers, to bespoke bodies and

necks for DIY partscaster builds, to fully finished custom instruments made under the Haynes Guitars brand.

As well as producing a fair amount of sawdust, the Guitar & Bass Build facility also has a fully featured spray shop that offers custom finishes in nitrocellulose lacquer and polyurethane with matt and high-gloss options available. From solid colours to sunbursts, sparkles, transparent stains and even relic-style distress, whatever your dream guitar looks like, the odds are that Haynes can deliver.

With this level of choice on the table, it would have been rude not to spec out our very own custom-built instrument and the good news is that one lucky reader will be able to win it by entering next month's competition. At the time of writing, it was nearing completion having recently left the spray booth.

Without wishing to spoil the surprise entirely, we can reveal that we opted for an instrument heavily influenced by the Les Paul TV Special and 'non-reverse' Firebird – it's also very much a Brit-based affair that includes a collaboration on the electronics side with House Of Tone Pickups in Chester and James' Home Of Tone in Stourbridge. All will be revealed next month but in the meantime, why not point your browser at www.guitarandbassbuild.co.uk and start thinking about your own custom build...

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# FENDER EOB SUSTAINER STRATOCASTER

Radiohead star Ed O'Brien's collaboration with Fender is an intriguing mix of old and new. **CHRIS VINNICOMBE** finds out if playing it makes you fitter, happier, more productive...

By colouring outside the lines, Radiohead have spent three decades creating works of desolate beauty more ambitious in scope than anything produced by their peers. Though it happens rarely these days, when the band's three nominal guitarists revert to type, their individual roles can be characterised thusly: Thom Yorke supplies the intricate rhythm parts, Jonny Greenwood the angular pyrotechnics and Ed O'Brien the widescreen ambience.

When it came to working with Fender to design the EOB Sustainer Stratocaster, O'Brien opted for a guitar that would play nicely with pedals and include an onboard Fernandes Sustainer circuit like the modified Clapton Strat that's been a live and studio staple in recent years.

Guitars with onboard sustainers are nothing new, of course, but the clever thing here is that Fender and O'Brien have taken the vast creative potential it offers and stuffed it into that most familiar of platforms – the Stratocaster. The Sustainer circuit is powered by a 9V battery and controlled by an on/off mini-toggle switch, while an additional three-way mini-toggle offers fundamental, harmonic and blend modes.

The more traditional aspects of the instrument are worthy of note, too. The satin urethane-finished 10/56 'V' neck offers a slice of high-end luxury rarely seen at this price point. The soft V rounds into a C shape en route to its upper reaches and it makes a nonsense of the notion that big necks are uncomfortable – it's addictive stuff and in combination with the 9.5-inch fingerboard radius and 21 Narrow Tall frets, playability is just about perfect.

## In Use

Before we engage the Sustainer, despite the non-standard pickup arrangement, there's an inherent 'Stratiness' through all five pickup positions. Head to the middle setting for the most authentic-sounding, vintage-style tones – if you are looking for Nile Rodgers and *Little Wing*, you can find them here. The JB Jr and Sustainer Driver are loud and clear and, along with the snap of a maple board, this helps ensure that parts retain definition amidst washes of delay and reverb.

The temptation when using a Sustainer is to gravitate towards Ebow-style single-note lines and while this works very well indeed, even more interesting stuff starts to happen with chords and arpeggios. Try using a soft pick attack (the bloom of the sustaining notes creates a spacey reverse-style effect), volume swells, varying the intensity, stepping on a tremolo pedal to chop up the signal, adding crunchy tape echo repeats, using a looper to create synth-style pads... things can get as far out as you want them to.

How many of us are guilty of noodling around in the same old boxes every time we pick up the guitar? This instrument really can change the way you play and inspire you to take a fresh approach. As O'Brien himself says, "I want to be able to get one off the shelf and be able to play it and do a gig and stuff like that, but it's for other people – it's for them to do extraordinary things with, that's what I'm excited about. I think people are going to have a lot of fun with this." We couldn't agree more...

### The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ One of Fender's most playable necks, at any price point
+ Light weight and excellent build quality
+ An endlessly inspiring instrument

- The JB Jr can be rather brash

***Fender's finest artist collaboration in years takes you far beyond your comfort zone while simultaneously feeling like home. A genuine triumph***

**9/10**

**KEY FEATURES**

### Fender EOB Sustainer Stratocaster

- **PRICE** £979 (inc gigbag)
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody double-cutaway electric guitar. Made in Mexico
- **BUILD** Alder body, bolt on 10/56 V-shaped maple neck, 9.5-inch fingerboard radius with 21 Narrow Tall frets. Synthetic bone nut
- **HARDWARE** 6-saddle vintage-style vibrato bridge, vintage-style tuners
- **ELECTRICS** Seymour Duncan JB Jr humbucker (bridge), Fender Texas Special single-coil (middle) and Fernandes Sustainer Driver (neck) pickups, 5-position blade selector switch, master volume, master tone, intensity control, Sustainer on/off mini toggle switch, 3-way Sustainer mode mini toggle switch (fundamental, harmonic, blend)
- **SCALE LENGTH** 25.5"/648mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 41.6mm at nut, 51.7mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 23.0mm at first fret, 24.5mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 34.7mm at nut, 54.9mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 7.6lbs/3.4kg
- **FINISH** Olympic White gloss polyurethane (body), satin urethane (neck) with gloss headstock fascia
- **CONTACT** Fender EMEA 01342 331700 **www.fender.com**

**LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...**

From the same family as Matt Bellamy's guitars comes the **Manson MA-2 EVO with Sustainiac** (**£1,798**), which is loaded with a Fernandes Sustainiac circuit and a killswitch for sci-fi fun. Alternatively, shop around for a Sustainer kit if you fancy modding an existing instrument

DAVID BOWIE
HUNKY DORY
Andy Warhol

# PRISMA GUITARS **TOLEDO**

When a bad injury left skateboarder Nick Pourfard immobile for six months, he started making guitars. **CHRIS VINNICOMBE** gets on board...

Regular readers will have noticed that San Francisco brand Prisma made its *TGM* debut in last month's Money Shot, in the shape of The Syndicate – a solidbody showcasing the company's innovative use of rock maple reclaimed from old skateboard decks.

Prisma's UK distributor, James Gascoigne, personally spec'd out this Toledo model, and Prisma mainman Nick Pourfard and his small team have delivered a real stunner. The striped skate top's mesmerising Blue Burst finish looks inviting enough to dive into and, in combination with the Toledo's clean lines, brushed-metal hardware and cream cupcake knobs, the overall package is one of the best-looking and most distinctive instruments we've reviewed in years.

The guitar's nitrocellulose finish has been applied so thinly that you can feel the individual layers in the pressed laminate. A thin nitro finish is good news for overall resonance, and even though the guitar's solid mahogany back means that it's carrying a little more weight than your average alder or swamp ash offset, when strapped on, the Toledo is certainly not fatiguing. It feels svelte and balances perfectly.

## In Use

The mahogany neck has been buffed to a glassy sheen, and its profile is somewhat reminiscent of a mid-60s Fender, although bends above the 12th fret offer less fight than you'd expect thanks to the ebony 'board's 12-inch radius. In its higher reaches, the nicely rounded C profile almost becomes a soft V. It's very comfortable to noodle away on, even when strung with the excellent-but-hefty Gabriel Tenorio 'long twist' 0.011 strings that were supplied.

*Clean sounds are a delight – the mahogany and maple helping provide a mixture of smoothness and snap*

The McNelly Sparkletron bridge pickup is voiced far closer to vintage Filter'Trons than many modern pretenders and here it delivers a gorgeous blend of complex harmonics, compression and clarity. Clean sounds are a delight across the board – the mahogany and maple helping provide a mixture of smoothness and snap. Expressive, expansive playing is encouraged as once again we encounter a Mastery Vibrato that performs beautifully. Be prepared to lose hours in the middle setting when you add spring reverb.

Despite the Toledo's offset outline, when you crank up the overdrive, the combination of the P-90-style neck pickup and the mahogany/maple/ebony construction sees a creamy lead tone come to the fore, especially in higher registers. Back down towards the nut there's a greasy snarl that can be as tough as Texas – David Grissom fans will be right at home.

In the me-too world of boutique offset guitar building, it's nice to see Prisma bringing something that's genuinely individual to the table in terms of looks and construction, while sonically, it's undoubtedly the real deal.

**LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...**

Dennis Fano is the king of the boutique offset, and his **Novo Serus J** (**£2,999**) comes with a neck to die for and is crafted from tempered timber. **Fender's American Professional Jazzmaster** (**£1,619**) is a modernistic take on the guitar that started it all, while the **Custom Shop's 1959 Journeyman Relic Jazzmaster** (**£3,389**) is the go-to for vintage specifications

**The Guitar Magazine VERDICT**

+ Innovative construction
+ Original aesthetics
+ High quality tones

– It's little on the heavy side

*This is no gimmick; if you can stop looking at it for long enough to play it, you'll find that the Toledo has a serious array of tones on board*

8/10

KEY FEATURES

### Prisma Guitars Toledo

- **PRICE** £2,750 (inc Mono gigbag)
- **DESCRIPTION** Offset solidbody electric guitar. Made in the USA
- **BUILD** 2-piece solid mahogany back with a bound hard rock maple laminate 'skateboard' top, bolt-on mahogany neck, ebony fretboard with 12-inch radius, 21 6105 frets, bleached bone nut
- **HARDWARE** Mastery Bridge and Vibrato, Gotoh vintage-style staggered-height 15:1 ratio tuners, dual-acting truss rod
- **ELECTRICS** McNelly soapbar-sized Stagger Swagger (neck) and Sparkletron (bridge) pickups with unplated nickel surrounds and gold foil covers, master volume, master tone, three-way toggle pickup selector switch
- **SCALE LENGTH** 25.5"/648mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 41.8mm at nut, 51.6mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 22.2mm at first fret, 24.4mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35.5mm at nut, 52.8mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 9.4lb/4.2kg
- **FINISH** Blue Burst nitrocellulose with natural back, sides and neck
- **OPTIONS** Custom build options available to order, see website
- **CONTACT** James' Home Of Tone 07584 947291
  **www.homeoftone.co.uk**
  **www.prismaguitars.com**

# LOWDEN
# S50 SINKER REDWOOD

To celebrate three decades in business, Coda Music commissioned a limited run of 30 Lowden acoustics. **HUW PRICE** tests one of the Downpatrick company's finest...

There is something undeniably organic about Lowden guitars. The emphasis is almost entirely on wood and the only components not of plant-based origin are the frets and the tuners. One suspects that if George Lowden ever figures out how to make a friction peg with a 20:1 gear ratio, gold Gotoh 510 machineheads will be a thing of the past. For now, he'll have to content himself with ebony buttons.

All joking aside, on opening the case it's immediately apparent that this S50 is an absolute tour de force of precision woodworking. Everywhere you look, there is evidence of extreme attention to detail. Check out the mitre joints in the rosewood, mahogany and maple purflings on the back, and the almost undetectable but dead centre joins in the Tasmanian blackwood bindings.

The headstock contours date back to the earliest Lowdens and it's an interesting design – especially when viewed from the back. The top of the peghead is rolled over and the shape is enhanced by an ebony back veneer to match the front. At the opposite end, the veneer curves outwards to conform to the carved volute.

The mahogany and rosewood neck is a five-piece construction and we particularly like the way that the two rosewood layers disappear under the rear headstock veneer to re-emerge at the top. The rosewood layers also accentuate the heel shape – another beautiful Lowden feature.

*It's a tour de force of precision woodworking – everywhere you look, there is evidence of this*

A tapered inlay at the tail block has pointed ends that cross the binding line. The wood is unspecified, but it looks like highly figured walnut and the workmanship is absolutely immaculate. The same can be said of the abalone soundhole ring and by keeping the decoration to a minimum, nothing upstages the sinker redwood top.

Both visually and sonically, the top is this S50's main event, but what exactly is sinker redwood? Well if you subscribe to the idea that 'old growth' wood offers superior tone, this timber is about as old as it gets. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, redwood was in great demand and Californian lumberjacks would float logs down the river to the sawmills.

During summers, when the rivers were low, logs were dragged into the centre of the river and piled up to create dams. Once the rains came, the dams were dynamited and the logs would rush downstream on the swollen rivers – all except those that had been at the very bottom of the dam, and were literally stuck in the mud.

KEY FEATURES

## Lowden S50 Sinker Redwood

- **PRICE** £6,750 (inc hard case)
- **DESCRIPTION** All-solid, 6-string acoustic guitar. Made in the UK
- **BUILD** Sinker redwood top with African blackwood back and sides, laminated mahogany/rosewood neck, rosewood bridge, bound ebony fingerboard, ebony peghead overlay front & back, 14th fret neck join, Gotoh 510 tuners with ebony buttons, bone nut and split saddle
- **ELECTRICS** N/A
- **SCALE LENGTH** 630mm/24.8"
- **NECK WIDTH** 45.5mm at nut, 56mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 19.5mm at first fret, 21.5mm at 9th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 38mm at nut, 54.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 2.06kg/4.54lbs
- **FINISH** Hand-rubbed satin
- **LEFT HANDERS** No
- **CONTACT** Coda Music 01438 350815 **www.coda-music.com** **www.lowdenguitars.com**

**LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...**

Naturally sinker redwood has attracted the attention of other builders. Check out the **Lame Horse Elko** (**£5,750**) and **Wicklund Guitars** (**£1,969**)

Eventually these left behind logs sank deeper and were covered over, sealed and preserved by river silt. They lay largely forgotten until 1995 when a man named Arky Ciancutti heard about the logs and set about salvaging them.

Due to a century in the silt, sinker redwood has a deep reddish brown colour that could be mistaken for streaky mahogany. More importantly from a guitar building perspective, the redwood becomes harder and stronger. We're told it retains the cedar-like tonality of regular redwood, but acquires more spruce-like brightness and harmonic complexity.

For this guitar, it combines with master-grade African blackwood back and sides, which is a personal favourite of George Lowden. As always, Lowden's pinless rosewood bridge with a two-piece bone saddle simplifies string changing. The S50 comes in a form-fitted hard case and also features a signed interior label.

## In Use

Most Lowdens have marker-free ebony fingerboards and this example, with its elegantly asymmetrical end, is no different. But fear not, because the pearl side dots are large and really pop thanks to the black outer edge of the maple/ebony binding. For testing, the S50 is equipped with 0.012 Elixir Nanoweb phosphor bronze strings.

Resisting for a moment the urge to dive into DADGAD, a strummed E chord causes the S50 to blast out a waft of heavily scented air along with a sound that is simultaneously deep, strong in the mids and glistening in the treble. Both volume and tone belie the body size because bass extension is very impressive and there's no hint of midrange boxiness.

The string-to-string separation, bass definition and overall balance are unusually precise without being sterile or damped. Quite the contrary, as the lengthy sustain and dense upper harmonics provide dynamic piano and harp-like textures.

The standard of fret dressing and setup is entirely commensurate with the woodwork and as such, is beyond reproach. Despite the lively dynamics and touch sensitivity, the S50 is easy to control and responds to a delicate touch as well as strong strumming and percussive Bert Jansch-style finger pops.

We consider the S50 a genuine all-rounder for strumming and fingerstyle, but we're most drawn to the latter. Although the S50 tone is well suited to an Americana repertoire, it's perhaps predictable that it really excels in open tunings with dropped lows combined with fretted notes and open string drones.

At its best, the S50 is vibrant, ringing, woody and ethereal. We also find that these qualities are drawn out in dropped tunings. Conversely, adding a capo anywhere beyond the 3rd fret slightly tames the dynamics and subdues the tonal richness. Perhaps this is where the greater sonic heft of Lowden's larger bodied models has an advantage.

Since Lowden offers a range of models, it may be interesting to consider if there is a 'Lowden sound'. This reviewer once owned a 1979 Lowden L32 and despite the substantial difference in body size between the L32 and the S50, the review guitar feels and sounds very familiar.

We recall the bigger L32's greater low-end power, but the S50 is a more refined and sweeter-sounding instrument. The way the tone is bright and airy played low on the fingerboard and then becomes more rounded and supple as you move higher is certainly a shared characteristic. Playing the top strings in the upper registers, both guitars take on a nylon-string smoothness as the upper harmonics soften.

Overall, the S50 is better made, easier to play and has a more involving and inspiring tone. The smaller body also ensures you won't develop shoulder and neck problems if you're under six feet tall – which is the only reason that L32 is no longer with us. Quality costs, but the S50 is a fine and special instrument.

**The Guitar Magazine VERDICT**

+ Flawless build quality and materials
+ Very easy to play
+ Very wide tonal range and loves open/dropped tunings
+ Tremendous all-round capabilities

- Quality always costs
- Sounds slightly muted when capo'd

*The great tone and playability that Lowden is known for, in a smaller and more comfortable form with some rather special tonewoods*

**9/10**

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# MARSHALL
# CODE 100 COMBO

Digital modelling, USB output, an LCD screen and Bluetooth... nope, this is definitely not your standard 100-watt Marshall combo. **RICHARD PURVIS** gets CODE-cracking

You could understand Marshall being a little miffed. For years, the digital modelling brigade have been offering cut-price emulations of its greatest creations with euphemistic names such as 'British rock head', 'Plexi crunch' and 'Large black amp with gold control panel whose name rhymes with partial'. The tech is getting better all the time, but you can't stop the tide of progress, so in the end there's only one thing that you can really do: emulate yourself.

There's more to the CODE series than digital replicas of classic Marshalls, however. As well as letting you scroll through the greatest hits of the company's history (with a few rivals also represented), they also include other 21st century touches, such as direct recording with cab simulation via USB, and Bluetooth control using a smartphone app.

You can also call on that Bluetooth link to use your CODE amp as a wireless music speaker, and there's a cab-simulated headphone output for silent practice plus a mini-jack aux input for playing along to your phone. Surprised by all this techy trickery? You shouldn't be. Remember, this is Marshall the modern lifestyle brand – maker of amplifiers, Bluetooth headphones and the occasional refrigerator.

As well as this 100-watt 2x12 combo, the range includes a 100-watt head for £50 less, a 1x12 50-watt combo for £100 less, and a 25-watter with a 10-inch speaker for a mere £189. The actual modelling, produced in collaboration with Swedish developer Softube, is the same on all of them: 14 preamps, four power amps, eight virtuaspeaker cabs and 24 effects, all accessed via 100 presets. Model selection has been very much 'Marshall first', so don't expect pure Vox chime or tweed grind, but there are a handful of off-brand elements to broaden your options. You don't get any blank patches to store your own sounds, so you'll have to overwrite unwanted presets.

Build-wise we're looking at a chipboard cab with an MDF speaker baffle and back panel, and unbranded speakers – clearly it would be wrong to demand vintage Marshall build quality at this price point but it all feels solid enough, with no obvious flaws or flimsiness.

Everything about the Marshall Gateway app's on-screen experience is easy and intuitive

## In Use

Don't know what the internet is? No matter, you can scroll through the presets with the included up/down footswitch, and edit them using the buttons, knobs and LCD screen on the top of the amp itself. Properly down with the kids? Download the free Marshall Gateway app and get this thing paired up for Bluetooth control.

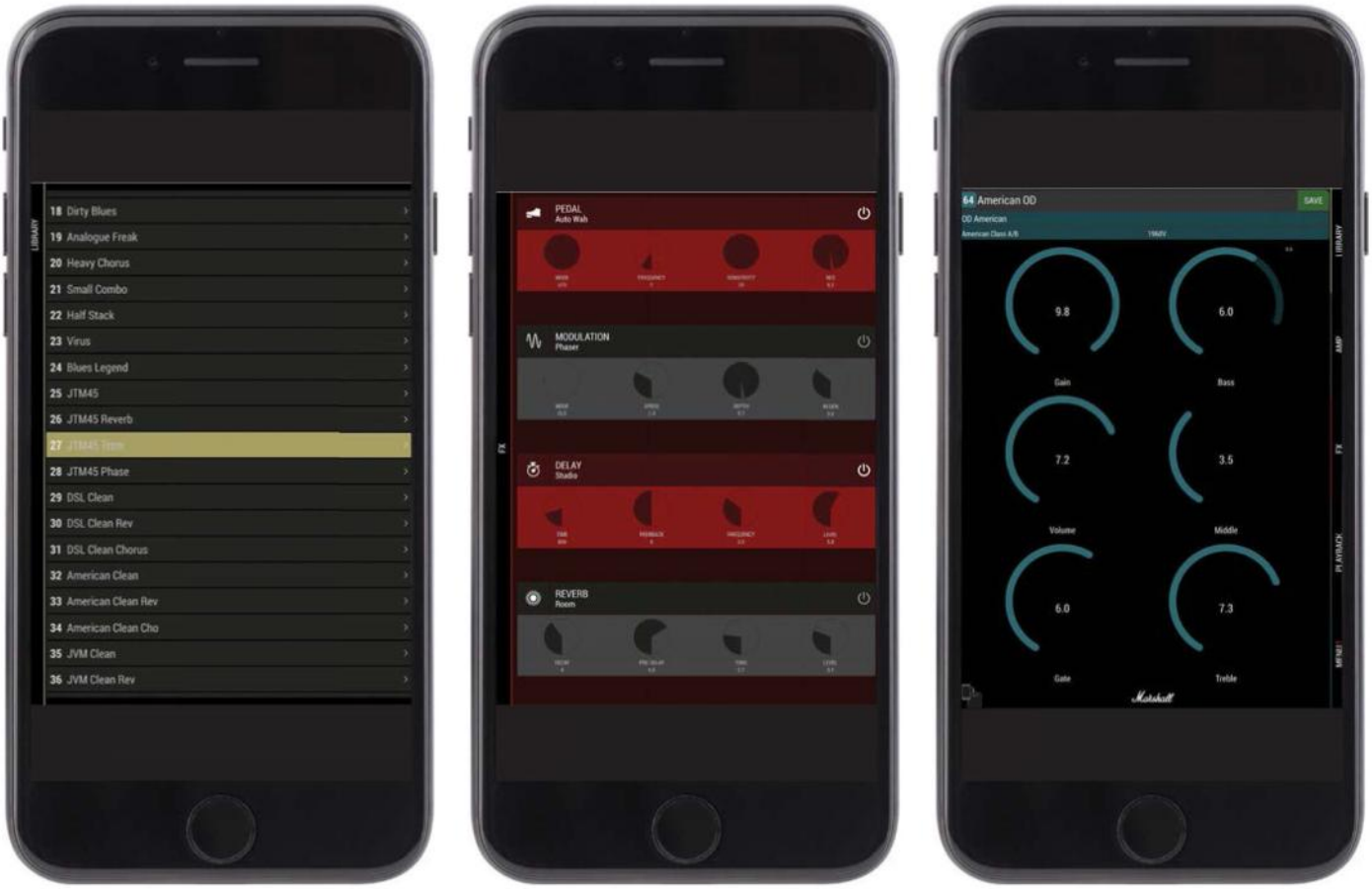
The bad news is, all our efforts to hook up the CODE with an Android phone are met with blankness. The good news – at least if you're an Apple user – is that pairing with an iPad is instant. The even better news is that the app is a much more satisfying way to navigate the amp than hardware alternatives. Making precise adjustments by swiping is a little tricky, but otherwise everything about the on-screen experience, from selecting presets to editing the effects chain, is easy and intuitive.

And the sounds themselves? Our first impressions are of an overbearing boominess to just about

### KEY FEATURES

### Marshall CODE 100

- **PRICE** £379
- **DESCRIPTION** Digital modelling combo. Made in Vietnam
- **POWER RATING** 100W
- **CONTROL PANEL** Gain, bass, middle, treble, model volume, master volume; on/off switches for pre FX, amp model, modulation, delay, reverb, power amp, cab simulation; button functions for tuner, tap tempo, Bluetooth, exit and store preset; preset scrolling and edit controls; mini-USB out, headphones out, aux in, footswitch in, power switch; FX loop I/O on rear panel
- **SPEAKERS** 2x12
- **DIMENSIONS** 695 x 480 x 275mm
- **WEIGHT** 24kg/53lbs
- **OPTIONS** Programmable foot controller (£49), 4x12 extension cab (£229)
- **CONTACT** Marshall Amplification 01908 375411 **marshallamps.com**




**LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...**

Fender's flagship modeller, the **Mustang GT 200** (**£402**), has wifi for direct internet connection as well as Bluetooth for smartphone control. The **Line 6 AMPLIFi 75** (**£289**) includes dedicated hi-fi speakers for a full-range streaming experience, while the dinky **Blackstar ID:Core Beam** (**£199**) is a neat desktop option

every one of them... but the problem here, it turns out, is that the factory presets have cab simulation engaged by default even when you're playing through the speakers. This really is daft beyond words. Would it have been so hard to have the cab sims applied only to the non-cab (headphone and USB) outputs?

Once that's fixed, we find ourselves exploring a nice variety of Marshall-based sounds. Some are listed by amp model – JTM45, Bluesbreaker, JCM800, DSL and so on – while others, particularly those with prominent effects, are categorised by tone type. The effects palette is limited, while many of the presets try too hard to show off what the amp can do and end up sounding corny, but there are plenty of solid starting points to choose from.

The 'American' options include what we assume is a Blackface Twin and a high-gain sound that's distinctly Boogie-like. They're pretty good but there always seems to be an element of British raspiness to the overdrive, especially at moderate gain levels.

To be honest, nothing sounds ear-shatteringly brilliant through these budget speakers, so we wouldn't fancy using the CODE 100 as a gigging amp; but plugging into an external cab gives an idea of its true potential – and listening through decent headphones (with cab simulation back on) is an even bigger revelation. The heavier sounds are really quite superb, especially with 'pre FX' overdrive sharpening up the midrange growl, and for hard rockers this thing makes a fine silent jamming tool.

## The heavier sounds are really quite superb. For hard rockers it makes a fine silent jamming tool

As we might have predicted, the guitar-specific frequency response of the speakers makes this a poor choice for hi-fi streaming – you wouldn't normally listen to records through a guitar cab, would you? – but again, that's not an issue if you're playing along to Spotify with headphones. And DI recording via USB? This sounds excellent, too, although there is one potential snag: that output is the old miniUSB type, and only through being lucky enough to find a cable at the back of a drawer were we even able to test this feature.

So there's a lot we don't like about this amp, yet we're still giving it an eight... why? Well, because the things it does well, it does very well – and when you consider that all that cool functionality and all those great DI sounds are also available for half the price in the 25-watt model, the CODE concept feels like a winner.

**The Guitar Magazine VERDICT**

+ A decent range of (mostly Marshall) tones in one box
+ Overdriven sounds are superb through headphones or USB
+ Simple and effective iPad app

- Speakers aren't the best
- Not much cop for hi-fi streaming

*A quirkily clever amp... but we suspect that the cheaper 25-watt version will have wider appeal*

**8/10**

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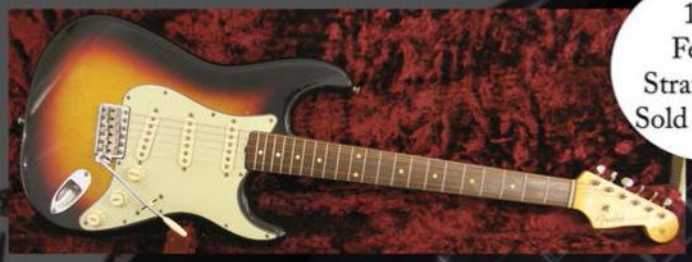

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# YELLOWROCK
# CA35 HEAD

Straight outta Guernsey, this head combines two preamp valves with a pentode-emulating solid-state output stage. **RICHARD PURVIS** puts the hybrid theory to the test

Anyone who's recently bought a new car, laptop or custom-bred attack tortoise will know that we are living in the age of the hybrid. But whatever happened to hybrid amplifiers? It's a sound enough idea – combining real preamp valve distortion with the convenience of a solid-state output stage – but it seems most tonehounds these days are still keeping it all-tube, or going all out in the other direction with digital modelling.

Maybe the hybrid amp world is in need of a new tech breakthrough to convince us it's still relevant. YellowRock Amps, a small company based in the Channel Islands, thinks it's made one. The secret of this blue beast is what YellowRock calls APEM: analogue pentode emulation. This claims to bring all the tone, power and feel of real output valves with none of the apparent reliability hassles or added weight. In this case it's working alongside a pair of JJ ECC83S preamp tubes to churn out 35 Watts, switchable down to eight watts.

The CA35 is a large amp, flatter than a Marshall JTM45 template yet

almost as wide despite the reduced valve count, and it's no lightweight – partly because YellowRock hasn't skimped on road-ready solidity, and the early 80s. A more coordinated shade would surely help, but let's just say YellowRock's styling isn't going to charm everyone out of the gate.

*Ultra-high-gain madness is out, but it will give you big, spanking rock tones, and it gets on fine with pedals*

partly because there's a full-length TAD reverb tank in there.

You can specify your own choice of vinyl colours and textures, so don't get hung up on this lurid blue… or the fact that, with the white panel, yellow logo and comic book font, it creates an overall effect that wouldn't be out of place on a budget PA head from

What you'll find on that white panel is straightforward enough, as this is a simple single-channel amp. The key controls: gain at one end, master volume and reverb at the other, with a three-band EQ section in between. There's also an effects loop level control, along with its in/out sockets, and a boost button that can be overridden by plugging a standard footswitch into the input below it. That just leaves the eight/35-watt power selector and another little toggle switch marked 'twang'. The rear panel has eight-ohm and four-ohm speaker outputs, and nothing else.

You'll notice there are no ventilation grilles on the top or back of this amp – because, in the absence of output valves, it keeps cool all by itself? Well, not quite: there's a fan, which is audible enough to be slightly annoying when you're playing super-quietly, but probably not enough to cause serious issues when recording.

The reason for the fan becomes clear once you've unscrewed the back panel to slide out the steel chassis for a look inside: it's a completely closed box. That means 12 little machine screws to undo before you can even change a preamp valve, which won't please amp techs… but then, the idea of this hybrid design is to be low-maintenance, so all being well it'll hardly ever need to see an amp tech.

## In Use

We have a couple of all-valve boutique combos of similar wattage handy for reference, and they've both kindly agreed to let us use their lower halves – one 1x12, one 2x12 – as test cabinets for the YellowRock to blast through. The comparison leads us to one rapid conclusion: it's a real

**KEY FEATURES**

### YellowRock CA35

- **PRICE** £1,200
- **DESCRIPTION** 1-channel hybrid head with spring reverb. Made in UK
- **POWER RATING** 35W
- **VALVES** 2x ECC83 preamp valves, solid-state power stage
- **CONTROL PANEL** Gain, FX loop level, treble, bass, middle, reverb, master volume; switches for boost on/off, 'twang' and 8/35W output power; boost footswitch input, FX loop send and return; power switch
- **DIMENSIONS** 600 x 250 x 220mm
- **WEIGHT** 15kg/33lbs
- **OPTIONS** The high-gain CA35H (£1,280), while combo versions of both start at £1,560; various options for vinyl covering
- **CONTACT** YellowRock Amplifiers **yellowrockamps.com**

**LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...**

The three-channel **Laney LV300H** (**£399**) uses one 12AX7 and a solid-state output stage to blast out 120 watts of British rock power. Scaling things down a tad, other hybrid contenders include the 45-watt **Koch Jupiter Head** (**£483**) and the teeny-weeny **Vox MV50 AC** (**£177**)

35-watter. We're used to solid-state output ratings needing a 'x2' to compete with their valve equivalents in real terms, but this thing has got to be loud enough for most modern guitarists' needs.

It's also extremely bright, and with single-coils we soon find ourselves turning the treble control down to zero (or near as dammit) and cranking up the bass to get a well balanced tone. From here, a flip of the twang switch will add enough extra bite when it's needed. Has this amplifier been voiced for sparkle-free high-output humbuckers, we wonder?

There is a decent amount of clean stuff on offer, as you might expect, but things start getting gently gritty from around 10 o'clock on the gain dial – or sooner, depending on pickups. The drive is rich, smooth and broadly British in character, with plenty of Orange-style midrange clonk. Flicking down to eight watts tames things down for something that's more squishy and tweedy, but the difference in perceived loudness is not as dramatic as the numbers quoted might suggest. This is no bedroom amp.

*The drive is rich, smooth and broadly British in character, with plenty of Orange-style midrange clonk*

Hammer the master volume and the output stage does seem to contribute some more overdrive, and there's nothing unpleasantly 'transistory' about it. Ultra-high-gain madness is out – for that you might need the CA35H model – but this amp will give you big, spanking rock tones, and it gets on fine with pedals. Not that you'll necessarily need any: the footswitchable boost adds a handy uncoloured lift for solos.

The promised 'all-valve' feel is pretty much there – it's fun enough to jam through, and if we hadn't known this was a hybrid we might not have guessed from sound alone – but does that mean we'd have fallen in love with it? Maybe not. Plugging those speakers back into their host amps, in both cases there's an added sense of depth that makes the YellowRock seem slightly lifeless in comparison.

For a £1,200 head, that's a little disappointing – but in the end, just like the aesthetics of the amp, it comes down to individual taste. If you're after tight, controlled rock tones with plenty of edge, the CA35 will get you there; but if that 3D magic is important to you, best stick with the big bottles.

**Guitar VERDICT**

+ Crunches just like an all-valve head
+ Footswitchable boost works well
+ Really nice reverb
- Lacks the natural depth of the best boutique amps
- Oddball styling

*It won't suit every playing style, but there's no denying this hybrid amp's air-shifting power*

**7/10**

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# ECHOPARK THE 1958 A HUMBUCKERS

The Guitar Magazine AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Echopark's Gabriel Currie and Arcane Inc's Rob Timmons developed these PAF replicas based on the pickups in Joe Bonamassa's Flying V. **HUW PRICE** finds out how they stack up...

**KEY FEATURES**

### The 1958 A Humbuckers

- **PRICE** $350 (sets only)
- **DESCRIPTION** PAF replica humbucking pickups, made in the USA
- **BUILD** 42 AWG plain enamel wire, alnico 4 and 5 magnets, 10 per cent mismatched coils, wax potting available on request, aged nickel or gold covers
- **DC RESISTANCE** 7.4k ohms (neck) and 8.2k (bridge)
- **CONTACT** Echopark Instruments 001 626-536-3317 **www.echoparkinstruments.com**

**The Guitar VERDICT**

+ A smooth, refined and full-bodied take on PAF tone
+ Superb clarity and sustain
+ Fine clean-up capabilities

– Some players may prefer more brightness and air and a wider tonal range

*An outstanding set of PAF replicas with their own voice that has a smoother, fatter and slightly darker character than some vintage originals and boutique alternatives, but still retains clarity*

9/10

If you're in the guitar business, having celebrity clients has its advantages. After all, how many pickup winders get their hands on the real thing – let alone original PAF sets from Joe Bonamassa, Joe Perry, Jimmy Vivino and Jackson Browne?

In the process of building a replica of Bonamassa's '58 Flying V known as 'Amos', Echopark mainman Gabriel Currie and his pickup maker of choice – Rob Timmons of Arcane Inc – devoted a great deal of time to analysing the pickups, which Currie rates as "probably the best" PAFs he has ever heard. The result of all that perspiration was this 1958 A set, combining 10 per cent mismatched coils, double cream butyrate bobbins, maple spacers, authentic 42-gauge enamel wire, steel baseplates, vintage-correct pole screws and aged covers. The PAF recipe makes for familiar reading, but few winders hit the bullseye. Let's find out what happens when we plug in...

## In Use

We're comparing the Echopark units to three other sets – the Gibson MHS pickups in a recent Memphis ES-335 reissue, a set of Monty's PAF replicas in an ES-345 and a pair of original PAFs in a 1961 ES-335 courtesy of Vintage Guitar Boutique in London.

Gibson's Custom Buckers demonstrate that unpotted pickups don't guarantee extended treble and clarity. We sense that although there's a great guitar here trying to wade through the mud, it gets lost. Installing the Echopark pickups in the ES-335 changes that perception in an instant.

The Echopark units have far superior articulation and are certainly more exciting. We particularly enjoy the quack in the bridge and they bite more than the vintage PAFs and the Monty's in a way that's assertive rather than aggressive. Despite not being as bright, the Echoparks are their equal for clarity and they also have a midrange resonance that enhances definition and intensifies ES-335 tone.

The PAFs and the Monty's provide greater contrast and tonal breadth between the bridge and neck, but the Echoparks are more consistent, offering variations on one absolutely killer tone that you never need to compensate for. This tonal consistency may explain why the in-between setting isn't quite as distinct as it is with some PAF sets.

With outstanding string separation and polish, it's like the Echopark set have been pre-EQ'd and are benefitting from really nice studio compression. Wherever you play on the 'board, volume and tone remain consistent, single notes played above the 15th fret retain girth and sustain abounds. Instead of that extended, shifting upper harmonic bloom, they bloom nevertheless in a darker sort of way.

All the defining PAF characteristics are here – the Echopark set may not be quite as dynamic and percussive as the PAFs or the Monty's, but the convincing and engaging take on PAF tone that they offer may suit a lot of players even better.

**LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...**

The list of really fine replicas of vintage PAFs remains short, but it is growing. Check out **Monty's PAFs** (**£216**), **Tyson Tone Preachers** (**$325**) and **Throbak KZ-115s** (**$549**)

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# WUDTONE
# DD TREMOLO UPGRADE KIT FOR PRS

Having successfully applied his engineering chops to the Strat bridge, Andy Preston turns his attention to the PRS vibrato. **HUW PRICE** tests the wham of the Wudtone man...

**KEY FEATURES**

**Wudtone DD PRS Tremolo Upgrade Kit**

- **PRICE** £177
- **DESCRIPTION** Replacement bridge kit for all vibrato-equipped PRS models. Made in UK
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- **CONTACT** Wudtone 07733 264984 **www.wudtone.com**

Andy Preston has previously impressed us with his cleverly refined take on the Stratocaster bridge system, but this time around, rather than combating tuning inconsistencies, the challenge he's taken on with PRS is tonal in nature. Like the PRS Tremolo bridge itself, Preston's case rests on the six fixing screws. His hypothesis is twofold. Firstly, that tone is improved when a bridge makes direct physical contact with the body of a guitar and secondly, that solid brass parts can dampen dynamics and high-frequency response.

Looking at a stock PRS Tremolo side-on, you can see that it floats above the body. The screw holes at the front of the bridge plate are countersunk to form six knife-edges that slot into grooves cut into the bearing screw shafts. Only the screws couple the bridge to the body.

Wudtone's PRS 'Dynamic Decompression' bridge kit is derived from its Holy Grail S-type bridge. The edges and corners are rounded over to better fit the PRS aesthetic, and the chrome-plated bridge is made from very high tensile steel with a vibrato arm to match.

A rolled-steel block is screwed onto the base and the kit includes six screws with threads identical to the standard PRS screws, along with a 0.5mm stainless steel whacker plate. This is fitted under the bridge plate and it's intended to transfer string vibrations more efficiently and provide a better surface for the front of the bridge to rock against.

Two types of saddle are available with the kit. Vintage-style bent steel is recommended for optimum tone, but customers who prefer a smoother look and feel can opt for stainless steel Ergo saddles. Alternatively, a £28 saving can be made by transferring your existing PRS saddles onto the new bridge.

## Sounds

Testing with two PRS models – a Wudtone-equipped Custom 22 and a stock Custom 24 – the tonal differences between the guitars are obvious. The 22 sounds brighter, snappier, livelier and louder. In contrast, the 24 has a fatter, warmer and smoother tone. We also find that the stock PRS sustains better in the upper registers where the unwound strings sound rounder and fuller.

Although slicker than a traditional Strat vibrato, the Wudtone does have a similar feel. In contrast the PRS bridge has the lightness and absence of 'fight' that characterizes knife-edge pivot trems. Put simply, the Wudtone bridge makes a PRS sound and feel more like a Strat. However if you prize the natural warmth, smooth dynamics and sustain characteristics of your stock PRS, the Wudtone changes may not be to your taste.

**The Guitar Magazine VERDICT**

+ Well engineered
+ Strat-style performance
+ Tuning stability
+ Brighter and more percussive tone

– Sounds less smooth and refined
– Tone becomes thinner

*An innovative and well-engineered retrofit for those wanting more Strat-style brightness, clarity, dynamics and feel from a PRS*

**7/10**

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**Steve Mayo,**
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DIY WORKSHOP

# GOLDTOP CONVERSION

PART THREE

After a few months on the back burner, **HUW PRICE** cracks on with his Greco conversion project, and with a little help from his friends, he takes some big steps towards his dream mid-50s Goldtop replica...

**1** If the bridge is square to the body you can use the original tailpiece to align the wrapover

**2** This guitar's original bridge was off centre so a trapeze tailpiece helps to align the wrapover

**3** The left stud is unsuitable for a wrapover and the Gotoh on the right is shorter than the Mojo Axe parts we are using

**4** Tapering the ends of the dowels makes it easier to get them started in the holes

In the last instalment of this Goldtop conversion series, I signed off by saying how I marked the bridge position on the body, but would hold off drilling the bushing holes until after the pickup holes were plugged. Shortly afterwards, I was asked to convert a Les Paul 50s Tribute to a wrapover bridge and it gave me pause for thought.

As usual, I found a very helpful online video on bridge placement where the guitar builder strung up the LP-style guitar he was building with the wrapover bridge shimmed up on blocks of wood. The strings have to be secured and there are two ways to do it.

If it's a scratch build, you can fix the tailpiece using a single screw in the rear strap button's eventual location. If it's a tune-o-matic to wrapover conversion, you can actually use the existing stoptail. For this project, I've decided to use a tailpiece because the original Greco bridge and tailpiece were fitted off-centre. I manage to track one down online for just a fiver, and we're ready to go.

The idea is to string the guitar up, tune it to pitch and slide the bridge to find the position where the strings all intonate as closely as possible. You also need to ensure that the strings pass directly over the holes in the wrapover bridge, and the holes in question are those at the back of the bridge from where the strings emerge rather than the front holes. Lastly, the bride has to be centred so the spaces between the E strings and the outer edges of the fingerboard are equal.

*Before drilling holes for the post bushings, decisions have to be made about which bushings to use...*

Once you're convinced you have found the optimum position, take a brad-point drill bit with a diameter equal to the width of the post openings. Set the bridge's 'fine tune' grub screws so each protrudes about 3mm into the opening and position the brad bit inside the openings with the point against the guitar's top and the side against the grub screw. Try to ensure it's perfectly upright and lightly tap the top to mark the body. You're now ready to drill the post holes.

## Bolt Action

Before drilling holes for the post bushings, decisions have to be made about which bushings

to use. The original studs can't be recycled because they don't provide a slot to retain the bridge. Instead their purpose is to hold a tailpiece flat to the body or clamp it using spacers.

When you start shopping around, it soon becomes apparent that there are various options in an equal number of diameters and lengths. Adding to the complication is that some are imperial while others are metric. It seems that even vintage and modern Gibson hardware varies somewhat.

Imperial bushings should measure half an inch in diameter, but length varies from 7/8 to one inch. It seems that earlier Goldtops and Juniors also had shorter bushings and in some cases, they have begun to lean forward due to string pull. Gibson must have become aware of this issue quite quickly, because bushing length was increased and the bridge pickup rout was moved 1/8-inch closer to the neck to keep a bit more wood between the bushing and pickup holes on the problematic treble side.

Having been impressed with the Mojo Axe compensated bridge kit I installed on the 50s Tribute, I decide on Mojo Axe's relic'd 1.19-inch bushings with the accompanying one-inch long studs. My feeling is that the longer bushings will be more securely anchored in the body and that the extra depth is more likely to facilitate tone transfer.

## Deep & Wide

Before drilling any new holes in the guitar, there are four old ones to plug. The bridge post holes are easy enough because the holes were 6mm in diameter and Axminster Tools & Machinery keeps a nice selection of beechwood dowelling in stock. The Greco bushing holes are problematic because they are 11mm in diameter and I can only find 10mm and 12mm.

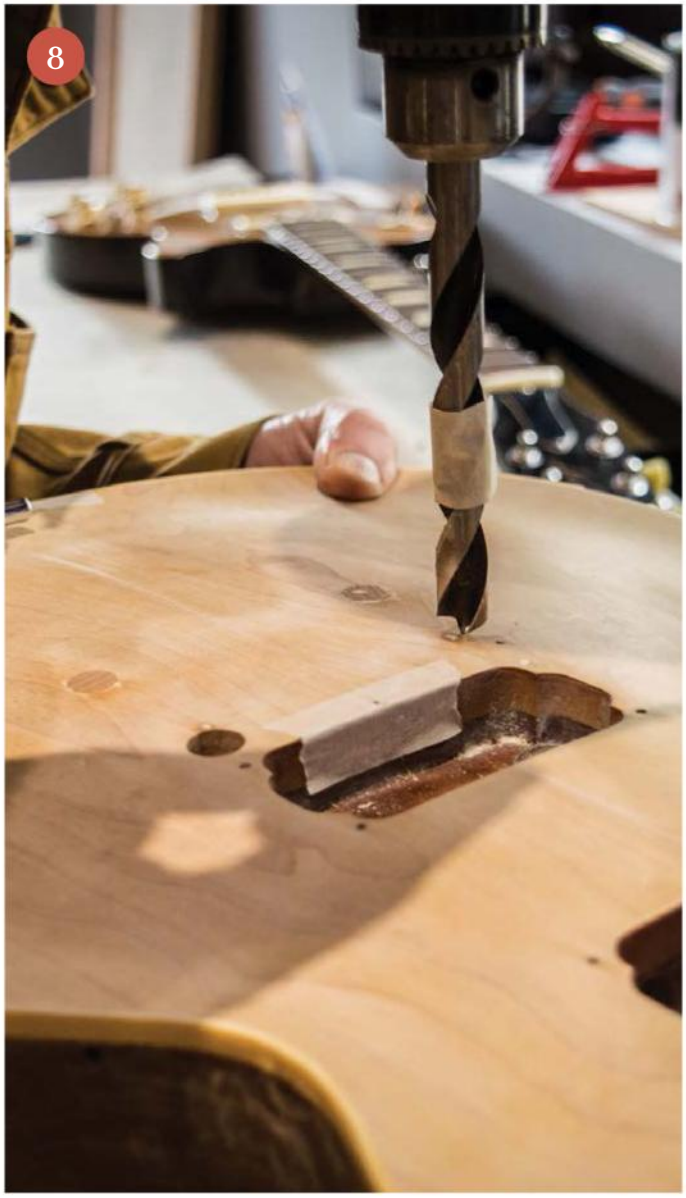
Widening the hole with a 12mm drill bit creates some chip out around the opening, but with the plug glued in with Titebond Original and a bit of two-pack filler, the results aren't too bad. Suitably chastened, I decide to take no chances with the new bushing holes. Sometimes you really do need to use professional tools, so I accept my mate Mike Phillips' offer to use his pillar drill for the new bushing holes.

It's often hard to find specialist tools in imperial sizes, unless you order from America and swallow the cost. Since the Mojo Axe bushings require a half-inch bushing hole, I decide a 13mm brad point bit from Axminster will probably be okay. It's a beast of a thing and I certainly wouldn't want to use it in a hand drill.

**5** This bushing plug has been glued with Titebond and needs levelling

**6** With a bit of filler, this levelled post plug looks okay

**7** The body is placed on the pillar drill and masking tape marks the depth stop on the 13mm brad point drill bit



**8** Care is taken to align the drill bit with the marked position holes

**9** The second bushing hole is drilled and both turn out very cleanly

With the pillar drill's platform adjusted square to the bit, I carefully lower the bit and adjust the body until the position marks I made are directly under the tip. With the drill switched on, I slowly lower the bit until it just begins to cut into the body, then lift it and lower it again. The trick is not to try and drill the hole all in one go. Clearly you need to ensure that the body doesn't move, but by drilling, lifting slightly, blowing away the wood shavings and drilling some more, you can achieve very clean and accurate results with no chippings or drill burn.

## Pulling The Plugs

It's probably a lot easier to turn a P-90 rout into a humbucker rout, but there's no going back now. However, I have never been under any illusions that my woodworking abilities are up to making routing templates and wood plugs that will be a tight enough fit.

*It's probably a lot easier to turn a P-90 rout into a humbucker rout, but there's no going back now...*

Fortunately, Jim Lewis of Lewis & Lockyer in Bedwas offered to help. In addition to owning a CNC router, Jim is a guitar enthusiast and *TGM* reader, so having carefully measured up, he made me routing templates for the plugs and P-90 holes, plus a selection of maple and mahogany plugs cut to fit.

For the plug routes, I need to build a cradle to hold the guitar steady and position the routing template. After a rummage about in the shed, I go with a plywood base and a couple of sides glued and screwed on top. The sides are placed to wedge the lower bout and with the body centred, I glue two further wood strips across the waist that are just slightly lower than the body in height.

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**10** These routing templates and plugs were very kindly supplied by *TGM* reader Jim Lewis

**11** A simple routing cradle to hold the body is made from scraps of wood

**12** The bridge pickup hole is enlarged ready for plugging

The body pushes in from the back and centres itself against the sides and the struts. Next, I cut hardwood strips in lengths of roughly 7cm and screw them onto the two struts. With protective pieces of cork between the hardwood strips and the body, the strips effectively 'clamp' the body against the base when the screws are tightened.

The router template isn't sufficiently wide to bridge the cradle width, so I secure it onto a wider piece of MDF using double-sided tape and four screws, and rout an opening in the MDF to match the plug template. The MDF is placed across the cradle, lined up over the bridge pickup rout and clamped in position.

Using a bearing-guided router bit, I begin by opening up the edges in passes, with depth increasing by about 5mm each time. This continues until I've skimmed the bottom of the rout to remove the last bit of finish and expose the wood for gluing.

I follow the same procedure for the neck pickup but it doesn't go quite as well. My router is fairly rudimentary and I use quarter-inch shank bits. Once things go beyond a certain depth, the bits tend to chatter about and the cut is never as clean as I'd like. Still, the result isn't too bad and since the plan is to veneer the top, the filled gaps shouldn't be an issue.

*The depth of the bridge pickup cavity is just about perfect for the one of the maple bridge pickup plugs*

## Block Party

By sheer coincidence, the depth of the bridge pickup cavity ends up being just about perfect for the one of the maple bridge pickup plugs. So that one simply needs to be glued and clamped up. In contrast, the neck pickup plug has to be modified to provide channels for the pickup and switch wires.

Unlike Gibson, Greco didn't rout wiring channels into the mahogany part of the body before gluing the maple cap. Instead they drilled holes from the corner of the neck pickup rout into the switch hole and – presumably before the neck was attached – diagonally from the neck pocket through to the control cavity.

Rather than stack a maple plug on top of a mahogany plug, I decide to use one of the deep mahogany plugs Jim provided,

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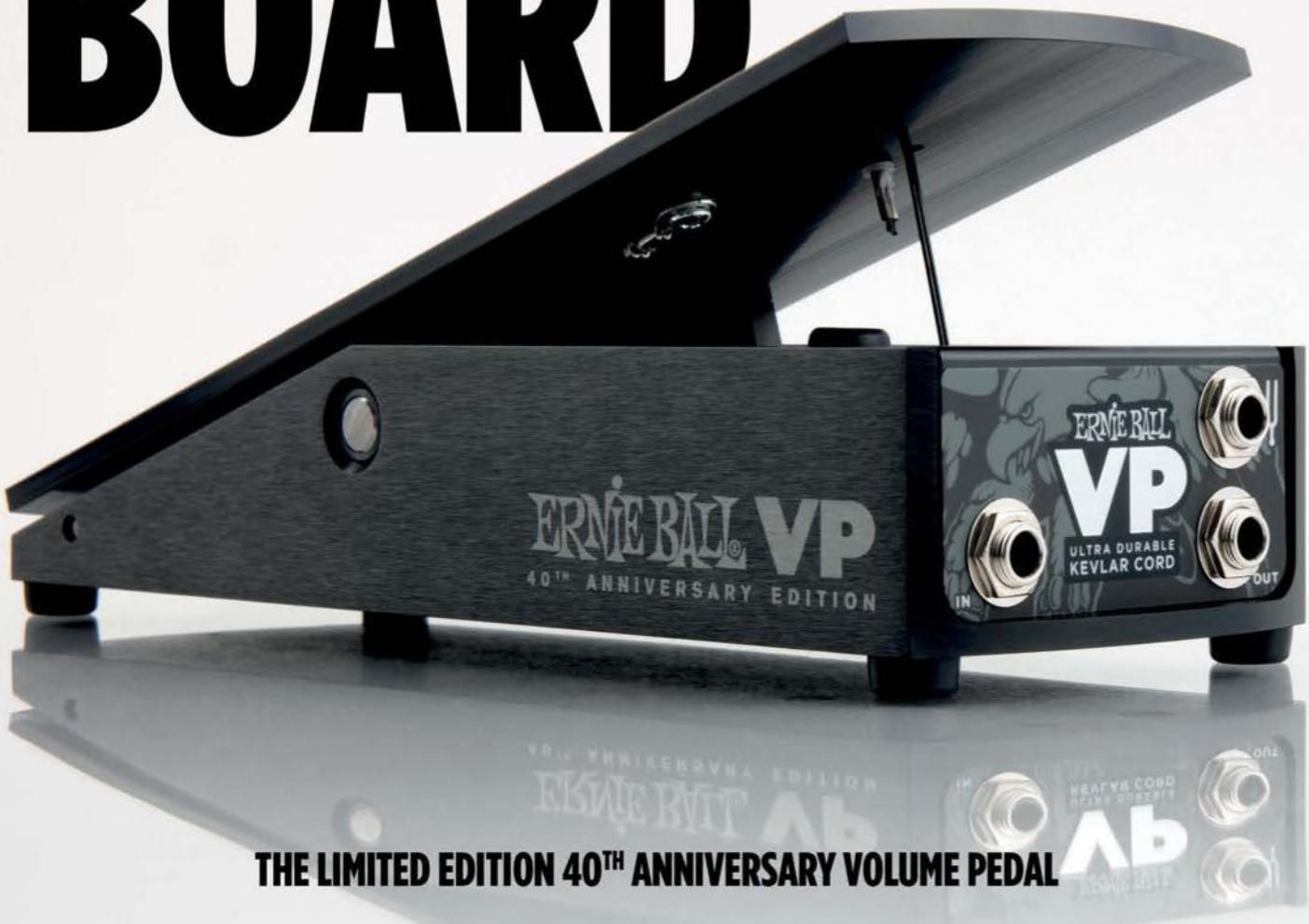


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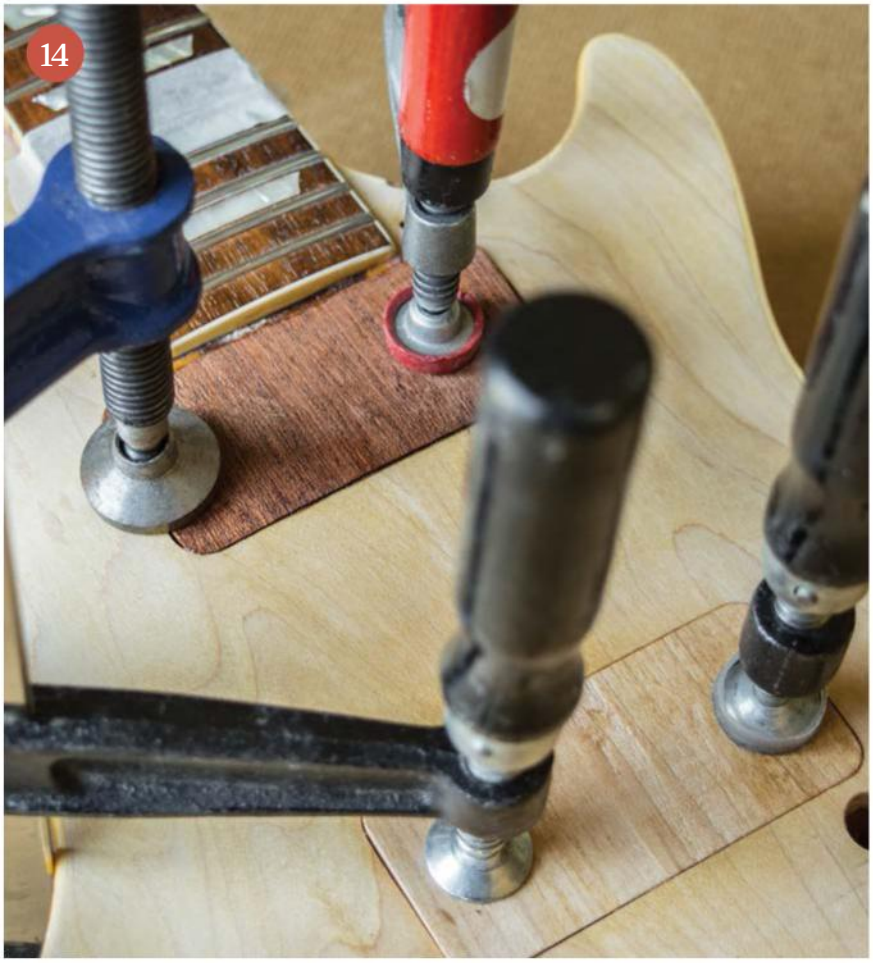
notching it out on the bass side so the switch wire hole will be exposed once the P-90 hole is routed to the right depth. I place it in the hole and draw around the top edge to determine how much material will have to be removed to bring the plug flush. Before installation, I pre-carve the plug's top surface using a small block plane. It's offered up to the body several times and I eventually call it quits with about 1mm proud of the body.

Various glues would be suitable, but I decide on Cascamite. It's the same type of glue that Gibson used for fixing maple caps on Les Pauls, so it's worth noting they didn't use hide glue everywhere during the 1950s. Cascamite is incredibly strong and has good gap filling properties – which is just as well.

You do need to mix the powder with water to make the glue, but it's easy enough if you follow the instructions – two parts Cascamite to one part water by weight. The glue is applied by brush and the plugs are clamped in position. Cascamite has a one-hour open time, but it needs about six hours to go off completely and the clamps don't need to be set too tight.

*The final part of the plug saga turns out to be a lot more enjoyable than anticipated...*

The final part of the plug saga turns out to be a lot more enjoyable than anticipated. I fix some 220-grit paper onto the base of a flat sanding block and surround the plugs with masking tape to protect the body. Before long, the plugs are sanded level with the masking tape, which is then removed and the sanding




continues until the blocks are level with the body. There are some small gaps in places around the plugs, but this is easily dealt with using two-pack wood filler and a bit more sanding.

## Two In The Bush

Now with a solid block of maple glued in place, I feel confident enough to install the stud bushings. However, there's the ground wire to consider. The original ground wire was routed through to the stop tailpiece bushing, but with that removed, we'll have to connect it to the new bridge bushing.

For this I use a 10cm long drill bit and start with the tip a few millimetres below the top of the bushing hole with the bit at a shallow angle. The opposite edge of the hole is protected with a few strips of masking tape. Having calculated where Greco drilled the wire channel, I take aim, and strike lucky. A bare ground wire is threaded through to the control cavity and folded down against one side of the bushing hole. I screw one stud half way into the bushing, line the bushing up over the hole and gently tap it into the body using a mallet.

This wedges the wire between the bushing and the body and it's held tightly in place. I quickly install the second bushing and string up the guitar. With only end to end adjustment, setting the action is easy and a few turns on the grub screws brings the intonation under control. Now if I squint and try very hard, I can begin to see a Goldtop emerging at the end of a very long tunnel.

**Special thanks to Jim Lewis & Mike Phillips for their help with this stage of the conversion**

13 Both holes are now ready for plugs and the humbucker 'ear' holes will eventually be hidden

14 With a generous application of Cascamite glue, the plugs are clamped and left for six hours

15 A 10cm bit is used to make a ground wire channel between the treble side bushing hole and Greco's drilled wire channel

## NEXT MONTH...

Next time Huw continues with the Goldtop as he adds depth to the neck, modifies its profile and gets the guitar ready for spraying

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# All about... Cables

Guitar cables, speaker cables and interconnects are often overlooked in our quest for great tone so what's on the wire? **HUW PRICE** lays out how to pick the right leads for you...

If you think the guitar world is full of voodoo, snake oil and pseudo-science, you should check out the preoccupation with cables in the even wackier world of hi-fi audio, where the likes of skin effect, oxygen-free copper and dielectric biasing flow freely. We guitarists are also pretty dependent on cables in our rigs, and some of the marketing blurb can get pretty 'out there', too. Of course, cables do make a difference to our tone – but for reasons that can actually be measured and explained without the need to resort to too much leftfield science.

## Crossed wires

As guitarists, we are primarily concerned with speaker and instrument cables. They are different and should not be used interchangeably. Take a look inside an open back combo and you will probably see two wires of identical diameter connected to the speaker terminals.

They may be loose or twisted together, but they are basically separate. Speaker cables for connecting heads to cabs have a jack plug at each end and generally look like regular guitar cables – but they're not. An outer layer of insulation contains the two wires but it merely protects the wires and keeps everything looking neat.

*Speaker cables for connecting heads to cabs generally look like regular guitar cables – but they're not*

Instrument cable is also known as coaxial cable. If you cut it in cross section, you will see a centre wire with an outer layer of wire braid separated by insulating material. The inner wire is soldered to the tip connector of a jack plug and the outer layer is connected to the sleeve tag.

The outer layer shields the inner wire from radio frequencies, fluorescent light interference and mains hum. After all, any noise picked up by the cable will go straight to the amplifier along with the guitar signal. If you try to use speaker cable between your guitar and amp, things are likely to get noisy – and not in a good way.

The consequences of using instrument cable to connect an

amp to a speaker are potentially far worse. Since pickup signals are so tiny, there is no requirement for instrument cable to have high power handling, so the wires are much narrower.

If the power generated by the amp is too great for the cable, it may get hot, which increases cable resistance and decreases the power reaching the speaker. The amp will 'see' the cable as added impedance, so it may end up overheating and if the insulation inside the cable melts, the wires may short out resulting in transformer damage.

### Speaker Cables

For speaker wiring, there are two key priorities – low resistance and high power handling. You can make your own speaker cables by soldering mono jack plugs onto regular mains cable and they'll sound fine. Cable resistance is proportional to length and diameter, so by using thick wire and keeping its length short, low resistance is maintained and the cable will handle the amp's power without overheating.

Electric guitar amps and speakers are not high-fidelity devices so the typical audiophile obsessions with imaging and frequencies beyond the range of human hearing do not apply. Classic tweed amps had cloth covered speaker wire and vintage Vox combos were hooked up with something resembling bell wire, yet most agree they sound fantastic. If someone does try to convince you that exotic speaker wire will improve your tone, it's probably because they're probably trying to sell you some.

### Instrument Cables

In contrast, instrument cable can have a profound effect on your tone – but only if you have conventional passive pickups. Low-impedance active pickups are pretty much immune to cable quality and if that's what you use, it's safe to stop reading right here.

A theoretical ideal for an instrument cable might stipulate zero loss of signal between the guitar and amp, no change in sound quality and no added noise. In other words, the signal that arrives at the amp is identical to the signal that left the guitar. Sadly, cables always fall short due to capacitance.

Capacitors are made from two electrical conductors in close proximity separated by a non-conductive material. As discussed, an instrument cable has a central conductor within a braided wire shield separated by an insulating layer. If you think that sounds a lot like a capacitor, you're correct. An instrument cable is actually a very long capacitor and it connects between the hot output of your guitar pickup and ground.

If you check out any regular guitar schematic, you'll see that each tone control has a capacitor soldered between the control potentiometer and ground. Rather than boost high frequencies, guitar tone controls are actually low pass filters that allow you to determine how much treble to roll off.

Cable capacitance has the same effect, but you can't control it. Instead, the amount of treble roll off is determined by the capacitance of the cable – and not all cables are created equal.

Typical instrument cables measure about 100pF (picofarads) per meter in length. That's almost the same capacitance value that Fender use for bright switches in amplifiers. If 100pF can make a clearly audible difference to high frequency response, then higher capacitance will have an even greater effect on your tone.

A typical guitar cable may be four metres long so its capacitance will be closer to 400pF. As capacitance increases, the roll off frequency is shifted ever lower and the sound gets darker. In essence, instrument cables sound darker the longer they get, however opinions differ on whether that's actually a bad thing.

### Zone On The Tone

Earlier we used the term 'theoretical ideal' because conventional metrics of quality don't always apply to guitar tone. Just as low-impedance pickup systems and low-distortion solid-state amplifiers attract very few guitar players, low-capacitance sonically neutral instrument


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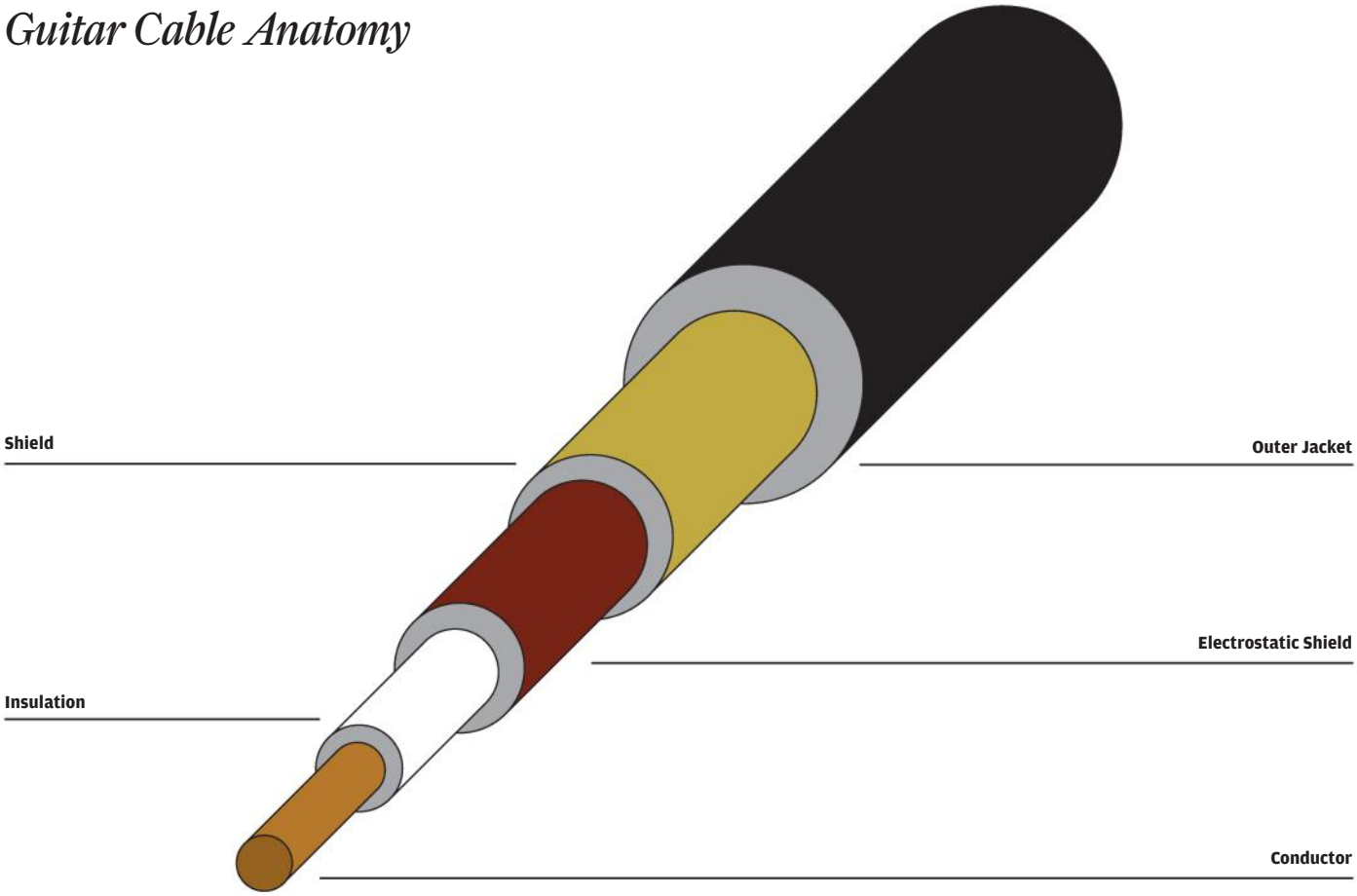
## *Guitar Cable Anatomy*




cable can work against you. What sounds ideal in theory often sounds less than ideal in practice.

Although treble roll off may seem less than ideal, many guitarists prefer the treble-reducing effect of longer cables. If you've ever played a Strat or Tele through a 100-watt Marshall, you can probably figure out why.

It's a matter of taste, but one player's bright is another harsh. Artists as diverse as Brian Setzer, Keith Urban and Jimi Hendrix have all stated a preference for lengthy guitar cables, but the explanation goes beyond mere treble roll off.

Guitar circuits are surprisingly complex because they contain resistors, capacitors and inductors. In combination with cable capacitance, you end up with a wah-style resonance peak at the cutoff frequency and the position of that peak can be character defining.

Guitar and pickup designer Bill Lawrence cites a specific example: "Jimi Hendrix used a coiled cord with 3,000pF (of capacitance). This was the secret of Jimi's tone: shifting the resonance frequency below 2,000Hz on his Strats has a similar effect to a midrange boost." Lawrence also noted that Hendrix would reach for shorter cables in the studio when he needed a brighter tone.

### Buying tips

The suitability of an instrument cable should be considered in the context of a complete rig rather than in isolation, and achieving the 'best' tone doesn't necessarily mean buying the 'best' cable. And if your quest for vintage tone has led you to buy vintage equipment or the finest contemporary replicas, low-capacitance cable may lead you in entirely the wrong direction.

*Instrument cables sound darker the longer they get, however opinions differ on whether that's a bad thing*

Instrument cable that is considered top quality and priced accordingly doesn't actually sound 'good'. Instead it's more accurate to say it has little or no 'sound' at all. If you're trying to gauge the audio characteristics of guitar cables, the capacitance per meter specs will provide a better indication than the price per meter. Cable manufacturers that do not publish the capacitance figures should probably be regarded with suspicion.

Try taking your guitar along to your local music shop to audition prospective cables. If its possible, take your amp with you, too – or at least try to test the cable with an amp similar to your own. Think carefully about the cable length you actually need and if you enjoy going walkabout, consider a curly cable. They tend to be quite capacitive, but that may suit your sonic tastes – and they do look cool!

If you tend to change guitars a lot during a gig, consider cables with Neutrik muting jacks for silent unplugging of your guitar. Gold-plated jacks look nice, but they don't sound superior. The gold is merely tarnish resistant and it will eventually rub off.

Despite the shielding, coaxial instrument cable picks up noise and the longer it is the greater the potential for noise pick up. Cables can also make crackling sounds due to static charge build up as the shield rubs against the insulation layer.

Genuinely high-quality cables feature an electrostatic shield to discharge static and keep cables crackle free. Try bending the cable you are auditioning and slapping it against the floor to see if it makes noise. If it does, then think twice about buying it, because it will only get worse.

Conductor materials can include copper, oxygen free copper, linear crystal copper, silver plated copper and solid silver. The centre conductor wire may also be solid or stranded.

There is much debate on the tonal merits of expensive wire, so if you can hear a difference then there *is* a difference – and if you can't, there isn't. If it's the latter, don't feel obliged to pay for something you can't hear!

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# Chord Clinic

In the 1930s and 40s, rhythm guitar meant a big jazzbox and a whole lot of three-note chord voicings. **ROD FOGG** hits the downbeats...

Back when jazz was king, the rhythm guitar player was expected to sync with the upright bass, playing a relentless four beats to the bar. In the early days the guitars were still acoustic, and although archtop guitars project a strong midrange with, heavy strings, strong hands and an efficient technique were needed to see you through a gig. One common solution was to use three-note chord voicings, but as we will see, these voicings can also be very useful to rock and blues players today.

Figure 1 kicks off with the classic jazz I-VI-II-V as a two-bar chord sequence in the key of G. Make sure you are muting the A string with the underside of whichever finger is on the E string (it's a good idea to mute the B string, too). Play each chord twice using a downstroke and gently release the pressure from your fret-hand fingers after the second pick stroke – imagine you're playing along to a swinging jazz bassline. Chord VI in G major is usually an E minor, but it is often changed to E7, and in this example we use the common substitution of G#dim7 for this chord. Sixth and seventh chords normally contain four notes, so to produce a three-note voicing you have to leave one note out. Mostly, we leave out the fifth, but in the case of the D7 here, it's the root note that has been omitted.

You can cycle round figure 1 four times to produce an eight-bar chord sequence, or, to make it more interesting, you could alternate figure 1 and figure 2 to make a four-bar sequence, which you then repeat just once. Figure 2 uses chords III, VI, II, V – chord

*Figure 1*

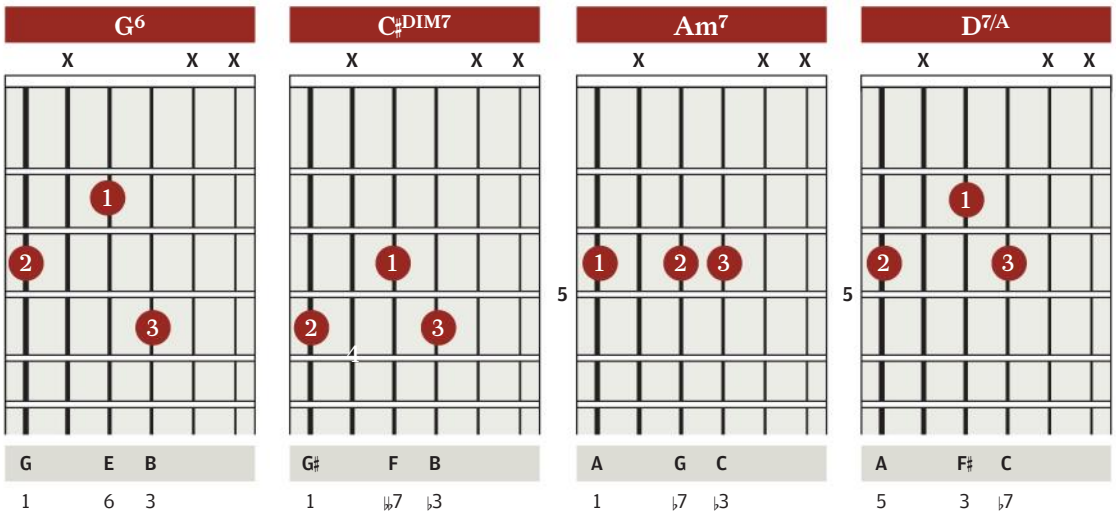



*Figure 2*

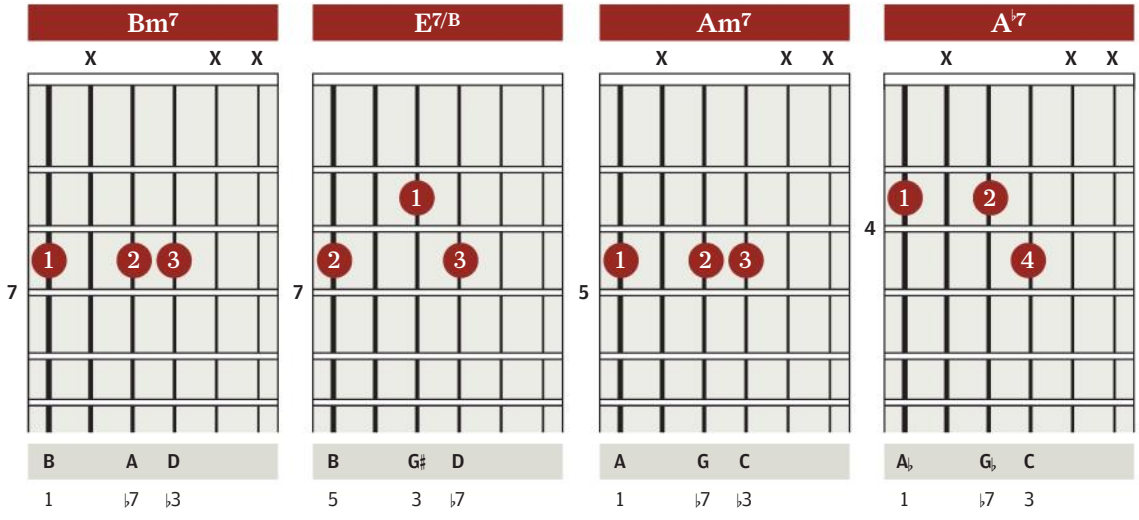
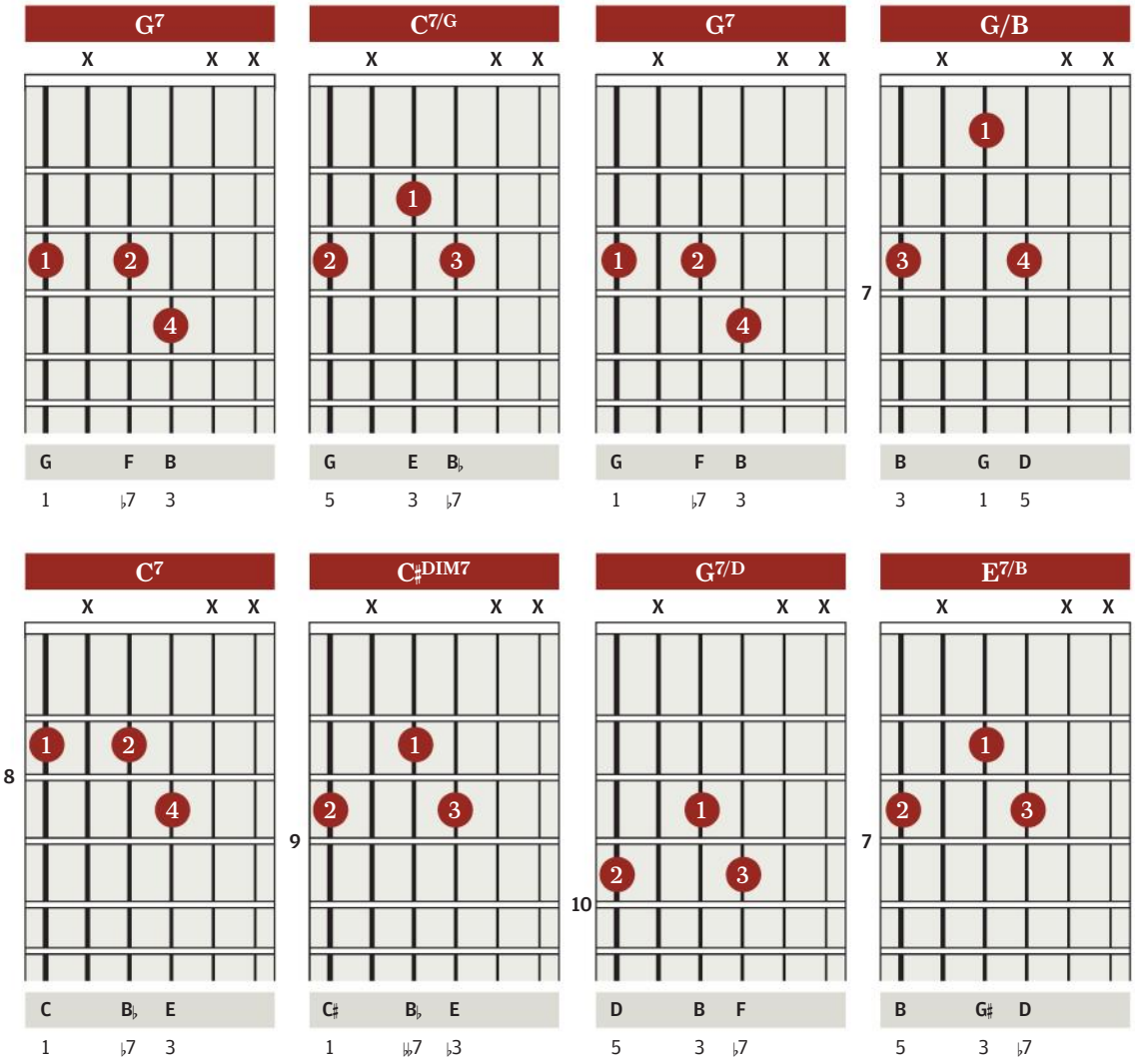


*Figure 3*




III is substituting for chord I and the A♭7 is a jazz-style substitute for D7. Looked at a different way, figures 1 and two are both turnarounds – you could play them in the last two bars of a 12-bar blues and head back to the beginning for a repeat. Let's move on to figure 3, which gives you a route around the first 10 bars of a 12 bar blues in G, again keeping to these chunky three-note voicings.

Each chord gets one whole bar, so that means four solid downstrokes – it'll sound good if you gently release the pressure from your fret-hand fingers after each pick stroke to introduce a hint of staccato. You might notice this is a 'jazzy blues' in the style of tunes such as *Stormy Monday*. If you'd like to switch it to a conventional 50s R&B blues, play two bars of C7 and leave out C♯dim7 and two bars of G7, leaving out E7/B. You could also take the option to change the order of the D7 and C6 chords. Don't forget the two-bar turnaround from figure 1 or 2 at the end... and repeat!

One thing to notice about all of these chords is that they can all be played at any fret, so playing in different keys should be no problem – but it does help if you know the

names of the notes on the E string. However, three-note voicings don't all have their lowest note on the E string; the A string can be just as useful. Figure 4 introduces the idea of playing a similar two bar turnaround to figure 1, this time in the key of C major.

We have chosen to start on Cmaj7, but if you wanted to use C6 just grab the chord from figure 3. The Cmaj7 and Dm7 both have their roots on the A string, and we've opted for the plain A7 as chord VI; C♯dim7 is also an option. The advantage to knowing more than one place to play any chord, with its root on either the A string or the E string, is that the next chord is more likely to be close to where you are and you won't feel like you are trying to whizz along to get to the next position in time. Notice that these chord sequences also contain good 'voice leading', where the different notes or 'voices' in one chord progress smoothly and satisfyingly to those of the next. Enjoy playing these chunky rhythm sounds and I'll see you next month.

*Figure 3 (continued)*

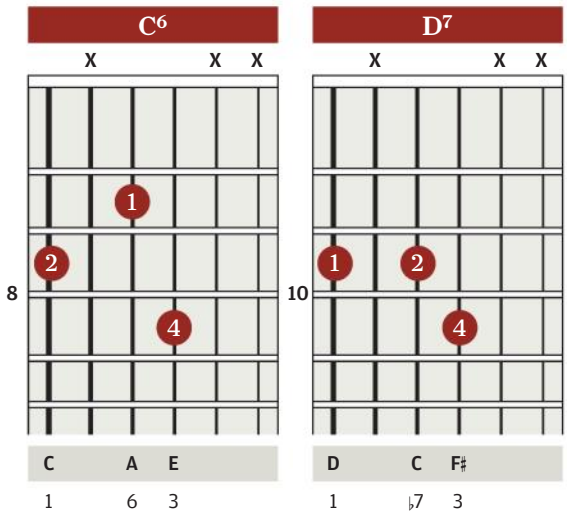
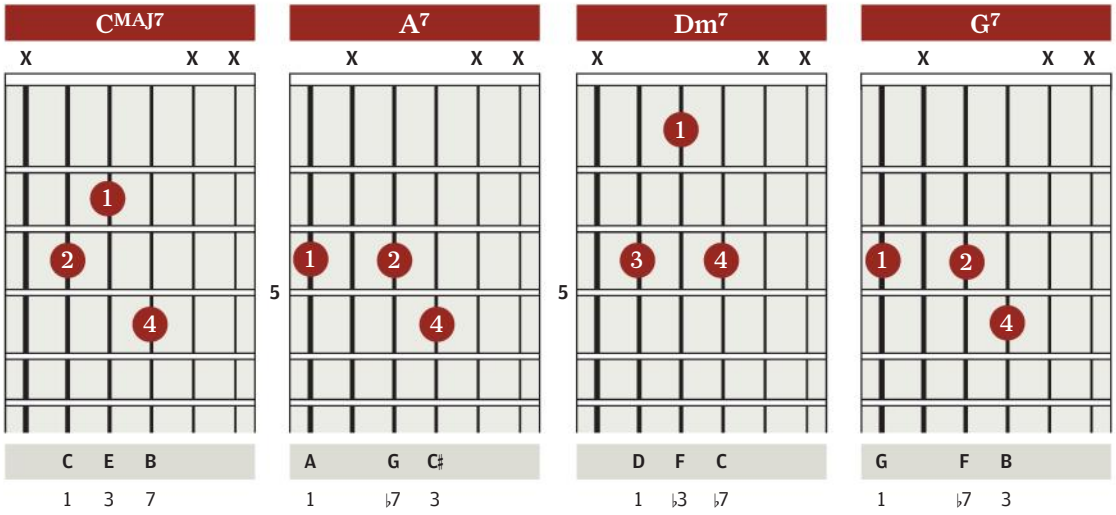



*Figure 4*



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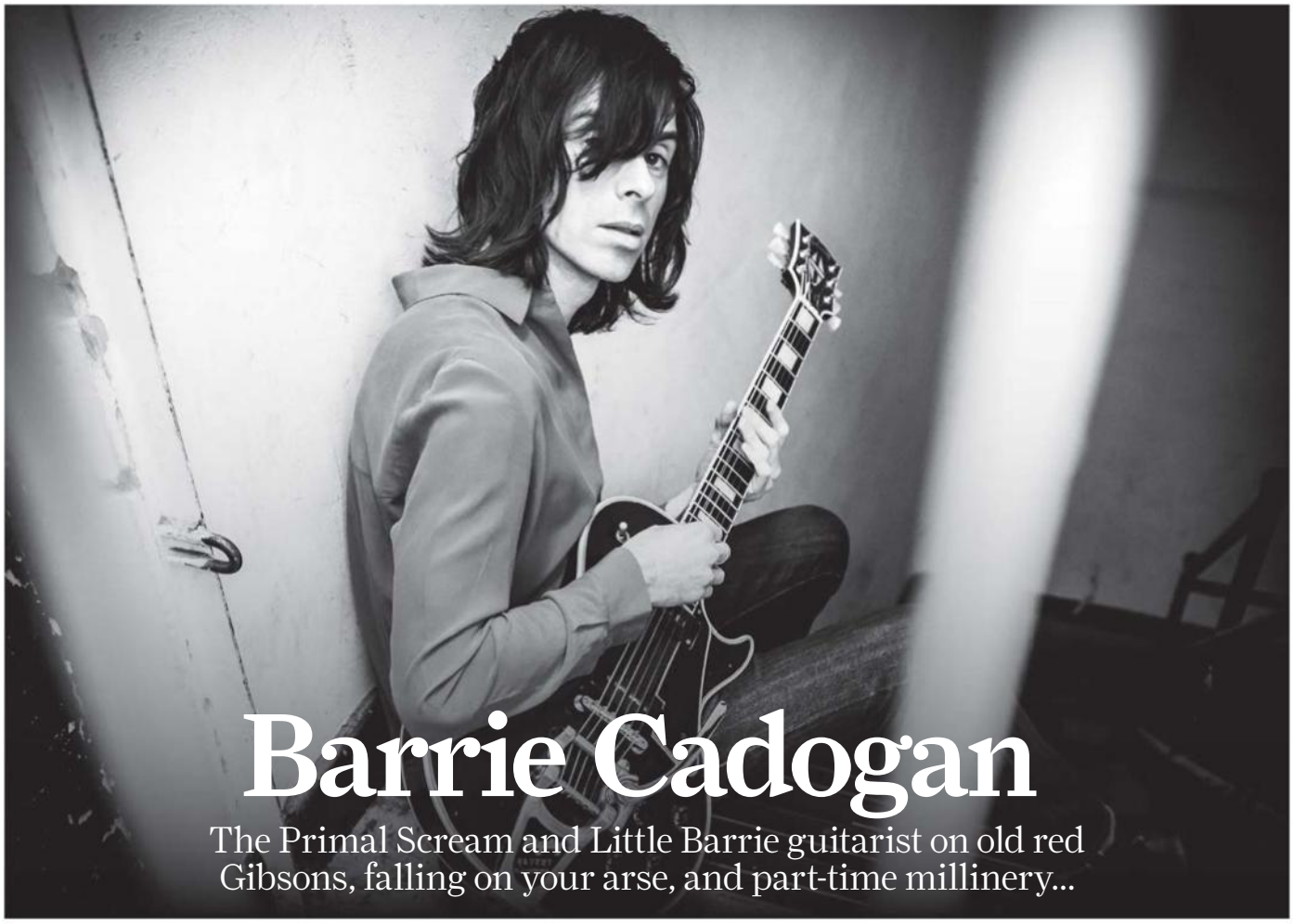


# Barrie Cadogan

## The Primal Scream and Little Barrie guitarist on old red Gibsons, falling on your arse, and part-time millinery...

**1 I couldn't live without my...**
"It would have to be my old red Gibson ES-330 from 1962. I guess it's the guitar that shaped my style and sound the most. I got hold of it around 2002. I've had about four different 1960s 330s over the years but this one is it. A year after buying the guitar some guy was walking round Denmark St with an original Bigsby asking £50 for it. I bought it there and then. Once I fitted that, the whole thing came alive. I've used it on every Little Barrie record since. There's nothing like it."

**2 In another life I'd have been...**
"I really don't know. It terrifies me to think what I would've ended up doing if I hadn't picked up the guitar. It sounds daft but it really did change my life. Before I played guitar I used to draw every day, but then guitar took over everything. I like designing things like my white guitar, my pedalboard and collaborating with JPF on an amp. I designed a hat recently for a label. Maybe I'd try and do more of that. I think I'm the sort of person who needs to do something creative, otherwise I'd go downhill."

**3 The moment that started it all...**
"There were three key things that happened. The main reason was that in 1989, my sister was always playing The Stone Roses debut album. I listened to John Squire's guitar work and thought It was fantastic, and his Gretsch looked great on the album cover. I thought to myself that it would be cool to be able to play like that. I asked for a cheap guitar that Christmas. Around the same time I saw an old Chuck Berry concert from the 60s on TV. I loved Chuck's red Gibson. Then I saw a 70s film of BB King. Those clips blew me away. I wanted to be in a band like Ian, John, Mani and Reni but with Chuck and BB's guitar."

**4 The one that got away...**
"The worst was a Sunburst 1962 Fender Jazzmaster. I bought it around 2002 for £1,500, all-original with the brown case. It sounded amazing and the bridge was really stable. I sold it to a friend in 2004 to buy a 60s Strat, but the Strat wasn't my guitar. I sold the Strat later. My mate still has the Jazzmaster."

**5 My Spinal Tap moment...**
"I slipped on my arse during a guitar solo with Primal Scream at an outdoor TV event in Dundee in front of thousands of people. The band and crew were pissing themselves. A friend missed me fall and just saw me playing on my back, he thought I was channelling the spirit of the MC5. If only..."

**6 The best advice I've ever been given...**
"One of my biggest inspirations has been Edwyn Collins. He helped us make our fist album when we were skint, and then showed incredible strength and determination rebuilding his life and career after suffering two strokes. He said to me, 'Every day is precious'."

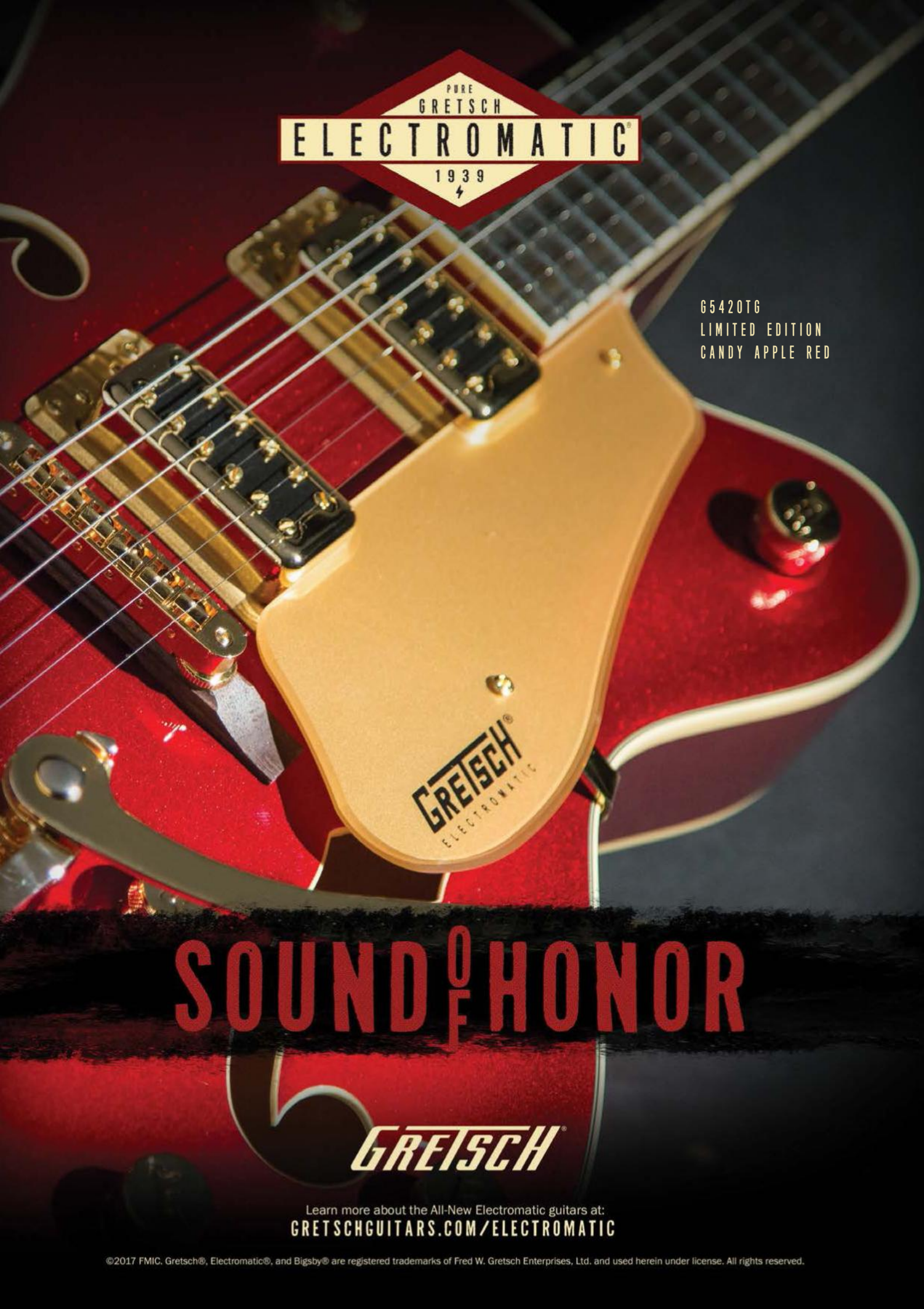
**7 The first thing I play when I pick up a guitar...**
"I don't really think about it. It depends on the guitar. Whatever comes to mind there and then."

**8 The most important thing on my rider...**
"A can of tuna fish."

**9 My guilty pleasure...**
"*I Can't Wait* by Nu Shooz. But it's not really a guilty pleasure to me. I loved it when it came out at the time. There's a great synth bass and heavy 80s handclaps in the breakdown. Good vocal melody. It's a cool pop song."

**10 If I could play one thing...**
"I'd like to be able to play *Some Girls Are Bigger Than Others* by The Smiths without making a mistake and to capture that beautiful melodic flow of Johnny Marr's playing. Or *Villanova Junction Blues* by Jimi Hendrix from his Woodstock appearance. A dark soulful minor key blues. No one's got anywhere near it."

**Little Barrie's latest album, *Death Express*, is out now on Non-Delux**

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